

Positive Futures

Getting Transition
Right in Scotland



Employment,
Skills and
Learning

Contents

Foreword	02
Introduction: the strategic context	03
Aim of the report	04
A baseline on which to build	05
A transition model fit for today	06
Summary of Recommendations	10
Overview: current situation	11
The new economic context	12
The impact on Service leavers and Veterans	14
An attractive source of talent	15
A sustainable employment cycle	16
A Shared Responsibility: Three perspectives for action	18
The Individual - who is well prepared and owns their journey	20
The Statutory Sector - which informs, supports and enables	28
The Wider Community - which welcomes, supports and benefits	42
Conclusion and Next Steps	49

Foreword

My November 2019 paper *Positive Futures - Getting Transition Right in Scotland* offered a strategic overview of transition from the Armed Forces today. It sought to bring the vision and thinking around transition up-to-date and set the scene for a series of reports which would look more closely at specific aspects of transition. These will make fresh recommendations to government aimed at getting transition right for all Service people and their families.

Transition impacts on many aspects of life. This report deals with the first, and probably broadest theme of employment, skills and learning and getting transition right across these closely related areas. On commencing this work, I could not have imagined how the Coronavirus outbreak would hit the world and impact all our lives. For all of us it has interrupted many of the freedoms we normally enjoy and meant adjusting to new ways of living and working. Sadly, for many it has had an even greater impact.

In the context of this report it has meant re-examining my conclusions and adjusting some earlier thinking to take account of the realities of the economic and social circumstances in which we now live and work. **I believe that acting to get transition right is now more important than ever.**

Setting the conditions for a seamless transition, governments need to embrace a more flexible and accessible transition model and framework of support. One that puts the individual at the centre, which reinforces the need to plan and prepare for the future early, and enables individuals to draw on as much or as little advice and support as they personally need. It is a model that reflects the demands of the employee of today.

My remit, as mandated by Scottish Ministers, is to act as an advocate for, and contribute to improved outcomes for those veterans and their families who choose to settle in Scotland. I recognise that some recommendations in this report take me into a 'grey area' that some may consider beyond my remit. However, a close look at transition and the statutory responsibilities of the UK Government and the devolved Scottish Government, quickly takes you to an overlap of interests centring on preparation to leave. Preparation is vital to successful transition.

Transition is a journey, not a single event which can be circled on a calendar. It is a journey of variable length and requires an understanding not only of the particular challenges veterans face, but of the local circumstances they will encounter when settling back into the civilian world. The Scottish Government has an interest in the preparation space, in ensuring that the conditions are properly set for all Service leavers who choose to settle in Scotland, wherever they are currently serving. And it is for that reason I find myself compelled to include recommendations which centre on that space.

As always, I am very grateful to the many people who have helped inform my thinking during the preparation of this first thematic report by contributing their time, expertise and ideas, as they have helped me to arrive at what I believe are the right recommendations. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay particular thanks to my team in the Veterans Commissioner's Office. They have had a particularly challenging time drawing all the information together for this report in the current circumstances.

We must all recognise that our Service leavers and veterans have much to offer employers and their communities in Scotland. They are a source of talent which we cannot afford to overlook. It is up to us all to ensure they are given the best possible chances to become not simply successful veterans, but successful citizens.



Charles Wallace
Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Introduction - the strategic context

A Ten Year Vision

“Those who have served in the UK Armed Forces and their families, transition smoothly back into civilian life and contribute fully to a society that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer.”

– ‘Strategy for Our Veterans’, 2018.

My work in this area builds on earlier thinking by my predecessor, who published a substantial report in November 2016, looking at how best to help more veterans and Service leavers secure meaningful, sustained employment. We know that good progress has been made against many of those recommendations but four years on, I wanted to look in detail at where the contemporary challenges and opportunities lie, as well as what shortcomings remain, and therefore what still needs to be done.

Before the Coronavirus pandemic there were two other veterans’ specific developments I had to set my work and further recommendations against. First, there was the publication of the long-term *Strategy for Our Veterans*¹ in December 2018. The result of close collaboration across the UK and devolved governments, the ten-year strategy set an enduring Vision and set of Principles and Outcomes that the 4 countries have pledged to achieve. For the first time we have a clear, long-term vision and pan-UK consistency of purpose. If we are to deliver on that vision, we need to maintain the meaningful collaboration between policy makers and ensure local circumstances are reflected accurately in national policy development from design, and not as an after-thought.

Secondly in January 2020, the UK and Scottish Governments published their responses to the public consultation on the Strategy for our Veterans. The Scottish Government’s delivery plan – *Taking the Strategy Forward in Scotland*² – sets out how it intends to respond across all services that impact on the lives of veterans and their families. Employment, education and skills is one of six key themes. The plan details not only what stakeholders told the government, but also what the Scottish Government and its partners now intend to do, and how they will go about doing it. The actions the Scottish Government intend to take, some of which started life as recommendations from my predecessor’s reports, is indeed good news for our veterans, their families and the Scottish economy and I shall be watching progress carefully.

As per the Armed Forces Covenant and the Scottish Government’s *Renewing Our Commitments*³ delivering on this long-term vision means ensuring that every veteran feels valued, supported and empowered and will never be disadvantaged as a result of their Service. Currently the UK Government is consulting on how best to further incorporate the Armed Forces Covenant into law over the course of this Parliament. Legislation which seeks to strengthen current arrangements to remove disadvantage and improve outcomes for the Armed Forces community is of course very welcome so long as it can be made to work in practice and in a consistent way across the UK.

Consistent with that long-term vision and the stated outcome from my own Strategic Plan, my aim is to empower veterans and their families to make informed choices to secure a positive future. That will not change.

To deliver on all of this we need to ensure our policy makers and service providers are responsive to need, collaborative in approach and aligned in their efforts to maximise impact. I want to stress the valuable contribution veterans and their families make to Scotland’s economy, and encourage more employers, particularly small and medium sized businesses, to see the real and tangible benefits they can bring to workplaces and enterprises across Scotland. Looking forward as our economy and communities struggle to recover from the global pandemic, that message is more pertinent than ever.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategy-for-our-veterans>

2. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/strategy-veterans-taking-strategy-forward-scotland/>

3. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/renewing-commitments/>

Aim of the report

'Transition' is the term most commonly used to describe the period of change around reintegration into civilian life from the Armed Forces. The timeframe is fluid, so this and the language of 're-settlement' can lead to confusion over expectations of where, when and how it happens and exactly where the responsibilities lie. I consider transition as a journey, not a single process or a point in time.

This report focuses specifically on the areas of employment, skills and learning. It makes suggestions and broad outcomes-based recommendations to the Scottish Government and others, for improvements aimed at getting transition right to benefit the individual and their family as they transition and become veterans, living and working in Scotland.

Empowering all veterans to adapt successfully to civilian life and make informed choices to go on to lead fulfilling lives and realise their full potential is my ultimate aim. But, as highlighted in my paper *Positive Futures – Getting Transition Right in Scotland*⁴ I believe huge potential benefits also exist for the economy, labour market, our communities and for the military itself, in terms of the inter-connections between a positive transition, recruitment and recognition.



4. <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/Positive-Futures-SVC-2019-ONLINE.pdf>

A baseline on which to build

In 2016 the Scottish Government accepted all of my predecessor's 19 recommendations from his report *The Veterans Community- Employability, Skills and Learning*⁵. In 2018 I asked the Scottish Government for an update on progress made against these and *all* extant recommendations, and in June 2019 I published my first independent assessment of the results⁶.

Moving forward, I said I would monitor and report on progress annually to maintain focus, aid prioritisation and drive delivery. This year, I intended to repeat this exercise, and publish a similar report in respect of the 12 months from June 2019 to June 2020. However, the Coronavirus pandemic meant government and other resources were re-prioritised to deal with the demands of the pandemic. It meant the detailed updates on which my assessments are based could not be provided nor could I expect to see the same degree of progress due to resources and effort being focussed elsewhere.

However, I did not want to go beyond the 12-month point without making some assessment of progress, so in June 2020 I published an *Interim Progress Report*⁷. I wanted to be sure that the Scottish Government took its results into account as it looked to refocus its economic and skills strategies to address the impacts of COVID-19 and to 'Re-mobilise, Recover and Re-design' NHS Scotland services. My ask of government and delivery partners was **not to forget veterans in the call to action in building Scotland's post-COVID-19 recovery**.

The Interim Report showed encouraging progress, which was later confirmed in my full assessment of progress, published on 17 November 2020. Based on detailed written up-dates, provided by Scottish Government policy officials, it showed two thirds of my 63 recommendations as having been implemented. Further details can be found on my website <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/> under the SVC Progress Reporting tab.

Sustained effort across government and partner organisations has led to notable ongoing improvements, but there is more to do. The report highlights the risk to further progress presented by fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, and underlines a need to pick up pace towards delivery if we are to avoid veterans being left behind. It shows areas where progress has either stalled completely, slowed or been caught-up in delivery problems. This was particularly evident in some of the recommendations from the 2015 Transition in Scotland⁸ report and the 2016 Employability, Skills and Learning report.

There is a very real risk that instability and job cuts will pose serious barriers to Service leavers and veterans, who already face additional challenges when seeking civilian employment. They are looking at fewer job opportunities, as well as the prospect of competing with candidates with significant experience of applying for and working in civilian roles.

My full 2020 annual assessment of progress was published on 17 November based on detailed written up-dates provided by Scottish Government policy officials. Details can be found on my website <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/> under the SVC Progress Reporting tab.

In the years since these earlier reports were published, events have clearly overtaken some of the original recommendations. What is very clear to me is that government needs to get ahead and address the outstanding recommendations in the areas of employment, skills and learning if veterans and their families are not to be disproportionately affected by the economic situation we find ourselves in. Stronger leadership, fresh ideas and closer joint working is now required to develop co-ordinated approaches and drive delivery. Key to driving progress in this area will be the recently re-vitalised Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (VESG). My hope is that the changes to this key strategic group bring the fresh impetus needed to drive forward and deliver on change.

5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/veterans-community-employability-skills-learning/>

6. <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/sgprogress/>

7. <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/2020-interim-progress-report/>

8. Transition in Scotland

A transition model fit for today

While there can be no doubt that the transition experience has improved greatly over the last ten to fifteen years, and while the MOD and all three Services have worked hard to help Service leavers experience a successful transition, we are now at a point where we must make certain transition is fit for purpose for the next generation of veterans and for the times in which we live.

Although I made no specific recommendations in my Positive Futures paper, I did develop some initial thinking on a basis for change to the way 'we do transition' and suggested that for today's Service leavers and tomorrow's veterans we need to think differently about this. I said we needed to go back to the drawing board and with a focus on the long-term, ask ourselves some hard questions about how well the current model fits the challenges our Service leavers face today. There needs to be some synergy between the resettlement process and recent developments, including the Future Accommodation Model (FAM)⁹ and the New Employment Model (NEM)¹⁰ which give greater personal responsibility to those serving in the Armed Forces.

Unless we re-examine transition by returning to the concept and framework on which the component parts are built, there is a danger that we will only ever be applying short-term fixes and 'bolt-ons' to the current system and we will stand in the way of any better alignment of resources with need and desired outcomes. To ensure we are setting the right conditions for a seamless transition for everyone leaving the Armed Forces in the 2020's, I believe a broad re-examination of the transition model that applies to all three Services is now required.

Transition bridges the responsibilities of central and devolved Governments (albeit to a greater or lesser extent). So, although outside my remit per se, the nature of the transition journey has such an enormous impact on veterans' and their families' lives, that I find myself compelled to reaffirm my suggestion to the UK Government on the need to address the preparation phase of transition so that individuals are placed firmly at the centre, and meaningful consideration is made for the impacts of transition into a different jurisdiction.

Furthermore, I believe the provision of support and services to veterans and Service leavers locally – which is a matter for the Scottish Government and its delivery partners – can best be designed, delivered and funded when built on the firm foundations of a transition model that understands the need to prepare and enables and encourages that preparation.

This is where the three Services need to continue to develop programmes to prepare their employees well to leave the Armed Forces. Preparation should be embedded into training and career development programmes throughout a military career, with buy in from the whole chain of command, until such preparation becomes just a normal part of training a soldier, sailor or airman. Whilst this may seem counter-intuitive to the fundamental requirement of the MOD to provide operational capability, it is a fact of life that investing in people for the long-term will benefit everyone.

Recommendation 1

A fresh transition model is needed – The UK Government should lead work to re-think transition and develop a more flexible and accessible transition model that starts early, looks to the longer-term, puts the individual at the centre and is integrated within military systems from sign-on.

Recommendation 2

Serving personnel should be prepared by the military for a working life beyond Service. This preparation should be built into training and career development programmes and transition thinking. Planning should be introduced early and reinforced throughout military careers and when leaving.

The UK government needs to move beyond the comfort zone of long-established structures and system-driven approaches and re-examine and redesign these around the current needs of individuals and their families in today's world. It needs to work on this collaboratively with the military community and the devolved administrations to achieve a UK-wide consistency of purpose and secure the fresh thinking and buy-in a new model requires.

Meaningful collaboration means devolved governments and delivery partners contributing positively to policy design from the outset. Only in that way can we be sure that delivery differences are reflected, and provision of services and support work well, no matter where in the UK a veteran chooses to live.

9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-accommodation-model-what-you-need-to-know>

10. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-employment-model>



Three key tenets for a new transition model

I have concluded that there are three key tenets around which a good transition model (and therefore a good transition) could be designed or framed. These provide a solid base to my thinking and my associated recommendations. The model should be **flexible** – accounting for the differing needs of the individuals involved; it should be **integrated** – as an integral part of an individual's career; and it should be **focused on the individual** – making clear the responsibility and ownership on that individual that sits alongside the right provision of support when identified and needed.

Flexible

– not fixed, to enable individuals and their families to draw on the right amount of support, advice and funding to suit their specific needs, when they need it.

Individual

– person-centred, not system driven – putting the individual at the heart of their personal transition journey to own it and shape what matters to them and their family. But also supported to enable informed choice.

Integrated

– a process, not a one-off event. One which is introduced at sign-on to build habits of ownership and independence and is an integral part of routine training and development.

Summary of Recommendations

- an outcomes focus

The table on the following page summarises my 10 recommendations in this report. They are intended to identify contemporary barriers to progress and consider what still needs to be done if we are to secure improvements and realise my vision of:

‘A Scotland where all veterans and their families are able to access timely, high quality support wherever and whenever it is needed and to realise their full potential in civilian life in Scotland.’

The UK-wide Strategy for Our Veterans focuses effort on six strategic outcomes. These are long-term, ten-year outcomes across six key themes, one of which is Employment, Education & Skills. It states:

‘Veterans enter appropriate employment and can continue to enhance their careers throughout their working lives.’

In a transition context I am concerned with the preparation period and I would want to use the widest interpretation of ‘employment’ here, to include: lifelong learning and self-employment or business ownership. But with those caveats in mind, as a destination I think the strategic outcome above offers a useful description of where we should be by 2028 at the very latest.

The outcomes-focussed recommendations in this report are more broadly drawn than in my previous reports in order to maintain a strategic focus on ‘what’ is required and to encourage collaboration on the specifics of ‘how’ to deliver the improvement needed.



Recommendations

Overarching

1. A fresh transition model is needed – the UK Government should lead work to re-think transition and develop a more flexible and accessible transition model that starts early, looks to the longer-term, puts the individual at the centre and is integrated within military systems from sign-on.
2. Serving personnel should be prepared by the military for working life beyond Service. This preparation should be built into training and career development programmes and transition thinking. Planning should be introduced early and reinforced throughout military careers and when leaving.

Individual

3. Serving personnel and veterans need to take responsibility for their transition. They need to 'own it', fully engage in it and embrace the support on offer throughout their military career and beyond.

Statutory

4. Advice and support is clearly sign-posted and promoted proactively, offered in a timely and accessible way and backed by advice and guidance which is informed by the latest local labour market information and circumstances.
5. Statutory support should be extended to spouses and partners with additional 'wrap-around' packages considered for Early Service Leavers and those struggling in a more competitive jobs market.
6. Funding for further learning or training should be re-examined to simplify the 'offer' and ensure ease of access and fit with the transition model for today. In addition, ELCAS learning credit support packages should be re-examined to ensure their fit with that more flexible model.
7. Work on the alignment of existing military and civilian skills and qualifications in Scotland should be completed and all new qualifications placed on both the RQF and SCQF frameworks as appropriate, to give veterans the best chance to compete for jobs when settling in Scotland.
8. Connections to the business community should be broadened and enhanced to ensure reach out to small and medium-sized enterprises as potential employers or as mentors to veterans looking to start their own business.

Community

9. In this time of social renewal, social enterprises should be considered as a model to support community development, provide services, facilities and employment for veterans to ensure they do not experience any disadvantage due to their military Service.
10. Greater collaboration is needed across veterans' charities and associated charities operating in Scotland and with central and local government to avoid duplication of effort and focus resources on areas of greatest need at this unprecedented time.



Overview

– current situation

The new economic context

In re-examining transition from an employment, skills and learning perspective, up-to-date economic, labour market and demographic information is vital. I have drawn on a number of strategies and reports available from the Scottish Government, the enterprise and skills agencies as well as respected independent commentators, like the David Hume Institute¹¹, the Carnegie UK Trust¹² and the Fraser of Allander Institute¹³.

I have also had to consider the very dynamic situation thrown up by the Coronavirus pandemic and how it may impact the veterans' community in Scotland. The full impact is yet to be seen, but it is already clear that some veterans are suffering from increased social isolation and loneliness that impacts badly on their mental health and general wellbeing. The situation can be exacerbated by redundancy or job losses and the challenge of finding employment in an increasingly tough labour market.

Economic strategies have been torn up or heavily re-cast and new priorities will emerge that will influence future actions and interventions. However, on a positive note we see governments considering propositions from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹⁴ and think tanks like Carnegie on Building Back for the Better¹⁵. Rather than returning to business as usual, the proposition is for government economic recovery packages to be designed to "build back better" and fairer. At the heart of this approach is the transition to more inclusive, more resilient societies, with reduced impacts on nature and efforts to reform public services, while ensuring that people and places disproportionately affected by the pandemic are not left behind.

In line with this international thinking, in August 2020 the Scottish Government announced its plans for *Re-building Better*¹⁶ with targeted measures to build a stronger, fairer and greener economic future in which 'no one should be left behind'. Publishing its response to the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery report¹⁷ and the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board¹⁸, it outlined key actions to generate significant economic growth, combined with a focus on supporting jobs, skills and training.

I have taken account of these measures throughout this report as well as the following:

- **Economic impact** - the extent of economic recovery in the coming month's remains highly uncertain and recovery fragile. September's *State of the Economy Report*¹⁹ showed Scotland's economy to have recovered by half the fall in GDP which followed the COVID-19 restrictions imposed in March. However, it also said the economy may not return to pre-pandemic levels until the end of 2023. The macro-economic impact of the pandemic will of course see a wide range of policy responses in different countries. At a UK and Scotland level, we can expect that to mean a broad and general re-examining of resources, priorities and allocations and a period of tightening financial constraints. It may mean support agencies having to look to new ways of doing things and in many instances, to take very difficult decisions.
- **Socio-economic impact** - the impact on our economy has affected many peoples' lives and livelihoods already and we need a co-ordinated response from government agencies in order to: sustain business and employment wherever possible; support people back into work, learning or self-employment and alleviate the anticipated effect of large scale job losses and redundancies. Part of that response must include consideration of the specific challenges Service leavers face and how to address them.
- **Future of work** - in addition to demographic change, the future of work has been changing for a number of years now, influenced by trends like globalisation, technological progress and automation which will change our understanding of what 'work' looks like and how the labour market operates. That change may well accelerate in the post-pandemic environment. For example, it is probable that home working, which increased massively in 2020 as a direct response to the pandemic, will continue as a more typical working pattern in the years ahead.

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- **Unemployment and employment rates** - it is worth highlighting the very specific issues of unemployment and employment rates and the challenges veterans may face. At the time of publication, the *Scotland's Labour Market Trends*²⁰ monthly statistical brief for November showed unemployment was holding steadier in Scotland than economists feared, with the rate staying broadly the same at 4.5% over the quarter and the employment rate rising to 75.3%. However, these figures do not yet reflect the full impact of the pandemic on the labour market as the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme continues to offer relief. The DWP claimant count²¹ which gives an indication of those turning to the social security system for support, was up from 4% pre-lockdown to 8% in October. This may give an indication of things to come, as with Scotland's service dominated economy being hit so hard, we can expect to see a shedding of service industry jobs no longer considered viable as businesses look to restructure or reduce staffing levels to stay afloat.
 - Clearly, the economic harms and challenges flowing from the current health pandemic are potentially enormous and far reaching and sit alongside the additional uncertainties and challenges of Brexit. However, crises can also bring opportunities and as it further develops its recovery response, the Scottish Government has an opportunity to drive forward on its ambition to make Scotland the "destination of choice for Service leavers." One example of that could be in establishing clearer career pathways into the private sector and Scotland's many small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). Existing links are predominately to large companies but if similar links can be forged more widely there is a clear 'win - win' for businesses and for veterans transitioning into employment in Scotland.

11. <https://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/>

12. <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/>

13. <https://www.strath.ac.uk/business/economics/fraserofallanderinstitute/>

14. <https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/>

15. <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/building-back-for-the-better>

16. <https://www.gov.scot/news/rebuilding-better/>

17. [advisory-group-on-economic-recover.](#)

18. <https://www.gov.scot/groups/enterprise-and-skills-strategic-board/>

19. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/state-economy/>

20. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/labour-market-trends-november-2020/>

21. ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets



The impact on Service leavers and Veterans

The situation we find ourselves in presents an unprecedented challenge for the Scottish Government and a Scottish economy which was already grappling with a shortage of workers and with skills gaps in a number of key areas and is very relevant to the considerations in this report. Pre-Pandemic, through its *Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2018-20*²² the Scottish Government was talking steps to transform Scotland's economic future. One of its stated aims was "to boost inwards migration by creating one of the most attractive societies to live, work and study in". That aim was, and still is, consistent with the aim to make Scotland the "destination of choice for Service leavers" and more than ever, Scottish Ministers must be alive to the benefits of attracting ex-Service personnel and their families to live and work in Scotland.

It is logical to suggest that for the Scottish economy to recover and thrive again, everyone must be able to gain the skills they need to realise their full potential, up-skill or re-skill and grasp emerging opportunities. The Scottish Government's *Future Skills Action Plan*²³ of September 2019 set out how it planned to respond to emerging economic and socio-economic challenges and enable individuals and employers to access the upskilling and retraining opportunities required.

Additional interventions have now been identified, including the Kick Start and Youth Guarantee Scheme for young people and the Transition Training Fund for the over 25's who have lost their job or are at risk of redundancy. These interventions are of course open to Service leavers and veterans but they are not tailored to take account of the specific circumstances or challenges faced by those transitioning from the Armed Forces. Support needs to be tailored because a 'one-size-fits-all' approach risks some Service leavers missing out on valuable help and support.

22. <https://economicactionplan.mygov.scot/overview/transforming-scotland/>

23. <https://economicactionplan.mygov.scot/future-skills/>

24. (figures taken from Armed Forces Service Champion Awareness Training for Moray and Highland delivered May 2019 by Forces Connect.)

25. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-population-survey-uk-armed-forces-veterans-residing-in-great-britain-2017-Annex A-table A1.1>

26. <https://www.gov.scot/news/business-survey-2019/>

An attractive source of talent

“Armed Forces leavers offer an exceptional work ethic, commitment and ability to work in some of the most challenging conditions possible. With an unrivalled approach to team working and leadership, as well as a multitude of skills, experience and knowledge; they are an asset to any company.”

– Jaguar Landrover.

The age profile of veterans has been changing and by 2028 nearly half of all veterans will be of working age, making them and their partners a very attractive prospect to employers and a source of talent Scotland should reach out to. Most Service personnel will work in civilian employment for far longer than the time they spent in the Armed Forces. For example, the average age of a Service leaver in the British Army is 29 years old, and only 1% will serve a full 22-year career²⁴. Today it can be estimated that there are around 100,000 veterans of working age, plus their families, living in Scotland²⁵. The question is, are we maximising this talent pool?

Before the Coronavirus pandemic, government agencies reported Scotland experiencing significant and well documented skills gaps in certain sectors, in particular in areas such as engineering, construction, health, teaching and IT. Particular demographic challenges in remote and more rural areas were also widely documented. In the new economic circumstances these can only be set to continue or, more likely, to expand. Those about to leave the military have a range of skills and talents which may be well suited to fill some of these gaps if we can create the right conditions for them to transition into and align their skills to the changing labour market needs.

Post the pandemic, it will be more important than ever for Service leavers to engage with labour market information to help them identify where the opportunities for employment lie, and enable them to explore new opportunities in emerging sectors, such as renewable energy and other examples of ‘Green’ employment.

In the past four years there have been a number of reports from different organisations which have looked at employment, skills and learning across the veterans’ community. What many of these reports suggest, and my own observations detect, is the beginnings of a shift – particularly amongst larger employers – when it comes to attitudes towards employing ex-Service personnel. It is no longer the case that large companies, particularly in the private sector, are employing veterans merely through a sense of moral obligation. They are doing it because they realise that it makes good sound business sense to do so.

“...it’s a simple business proposition – employ veterans and you will reap the rewards.”

– Ray Lock, CEO, Forces in Mind Trust.

While this shift is very welcome, it is also clear to me that this message needs to reach all employers, not just the larger organisations. The Scottish Government needs to build a strong, positive narrative if we are to see that shift become a sea-change in the way employers see veterans and the value they can bring. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99% of all private sector businesses in Scotland²⁶ and many ex-servicemen and women will work for a SME. **The Scottish Government must therefore increase its efforts to reach out to these employers and to evidence the value of employing veterans.**

5 Reasons to Employ Veterans

1. Veterans have strong technical skills and unique qualities
2. Veterans have valuable attributes and are adaptable
3. Veterans make highly effective employees
4. Employing veterans is good for business and society
5. Veterans fill skills gaps

Taken from ‘Capitalising on Military Talent toolkit’ developed by Business in the Community (BITC) and SaluteMyJob on behalf of the Scottish Government

A sustainable employment cycle

Ensuring veterans are given the appropriate information to make informed choices and gain meaningful employment after military Service, is of course of direct benefit to that individual and their family. However, taking a wider view, if we get this particular part of the equation right, it can hopefully lead to a situation which is not only beneficial to the individual and the Scottish and UK economies, but also to the Armed Forces and wider society.

In his authoritative *Veterans Transition Review*²⁷, published in 2014, Lord Ashcroft said that:

“a good transition is more than a matter of meeting our obligations to a series of individuals. It can help to promote the core functions of our Armed Forces, and consequently should not be thought of as a fringe activity.”

He suggested that a good transition could make a real difference to what he termed the four Rs Cycle: Recruitment, Retention, Reputation and the Reserves. The current economic situation and changes to the nature of the employer/employee relationship in the Armed Forces of today has led me to consider Ashcroft’s suggestion in a new light.



²⁷. <http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/vtrreport.pdf>

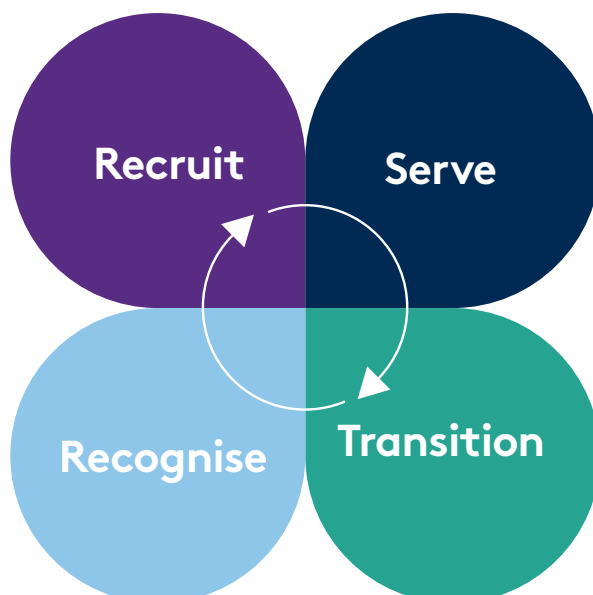
A sustainable employment model

Recruit

- the MOD must be able to maintain an Armed Force and attract, re-attract and retain individuals. They should recognise the changing world of work where individuals may have several careers in their lifetime

Recognition

- There is a need to improve the public and employers' perception of ex-Service personnel, and see them and their families as valuable assets to the workforce and economy



Serve

- MOD need to offer job opportunities and training which maximise performance, personal advancement and enable current and future personal aspirations for serving personnel

Transition

- Veterans and their families should be well supported, enabling them to make informed choices and positive transitions into the community and wider world of work

This model attempts to consider the effects of an employment cycle from individual, societal and employer perspectives. Thus an individual could move through: **Recruitment**, which may happen more than once in a working life; to **Service**, as an active member of the Armed Forces; through a dynamic **Transition and Re-settlement**; to **Recognition** by society and employers as a positive asset; which could also potentially lead to a return to military Service, either as a Regular or a Reservist.

On the societal front, it could bring benefits to a society that better understands the value of Service in the Armed Forces and of the skills and experience ex-Service personnel can bring. The majority of veterans make good citizens and good employees but outdated and unhelpful stereotyping remains and can often stand in the way of a good transition and ultimately lead to a lost opportunity for civilian employers and communities.

From the MOD's perspective, the cycle sees Service in the Armed Forces as a career choice that could be made more than once in a working life. It highlights the benefits to the Armed Forces if they are seen as dynamic employers who seek to develop their employees, and who understand the place they hold in the wider labour market. It also brings Service life more in line with the broader societal and economic changes happening in the way we work and live today.

However, it is my belief that the benefits this Cycle of Employment may bring can only be realised if built on a 'transition model fit for today' proposed in Recommendation 1 on page 10.



A Shared Responsibility

Three perspectives for action

In the following sections of this report I want to look at the transition journey from three distinctive viewpoints: the individual, the statutory sector and the community. If all three elements work in harmony, overlapping where required, then the chances of a successful transition are significantly increased.

The Individual and their family

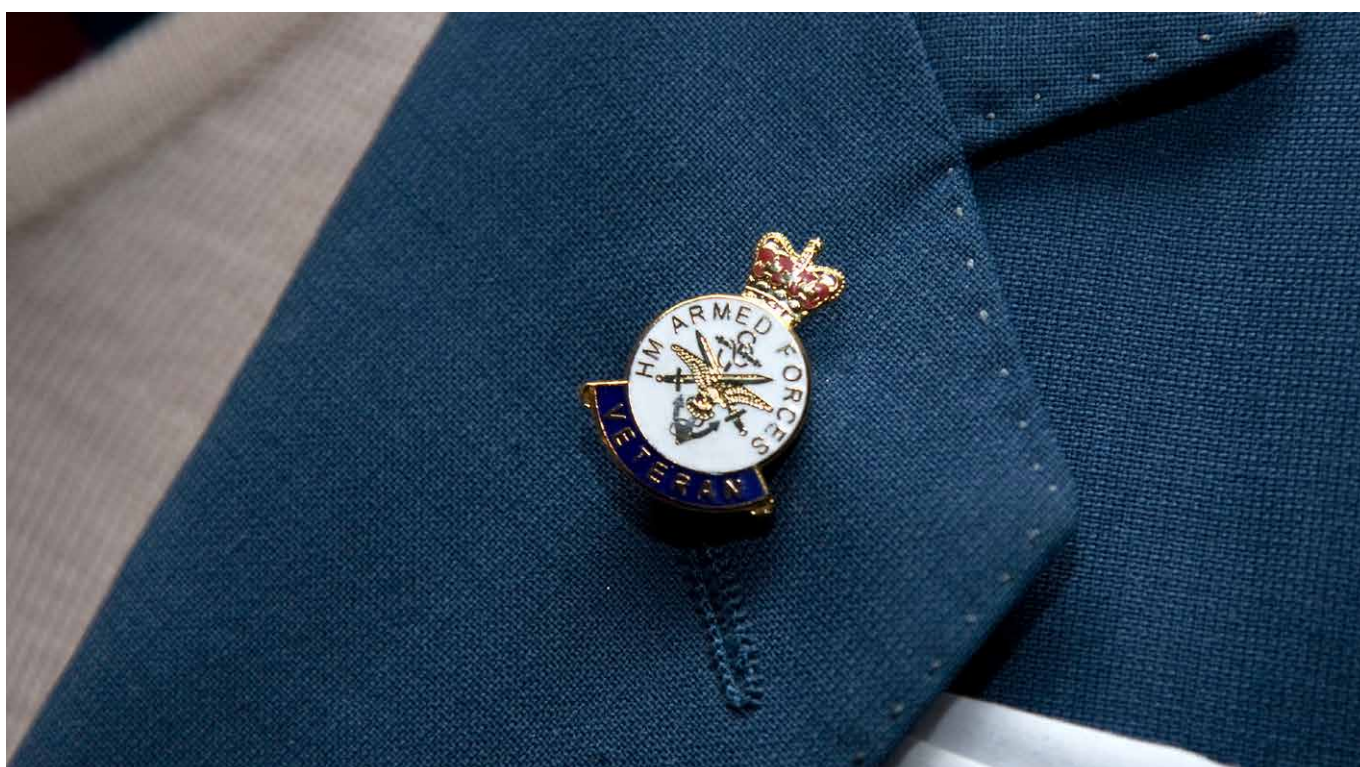
The individual Service leaver: their needs and aspirations and those of their partner and family.

The Statutory sector

including central and local government responsibilities.

The Community

including the 3rd sector, employers and businesses.



The Individual – who is well prepared and owns their journey

The first perspective through which I have considered transition is that of the individual Service leaver. A good transition is an undefined concept but I consider it means veterans and their families being empowered to make informed choices to realise their full potential and adapt successfully to civilian life. For me, a recent description settled on by a group of senior NCOs, sums it up rather well, describing the outcome of a successful transition as “being happy and content with their situation; having enough money; enjoying work; and having a good work-life balance”. I suspect they speak for many of us, although some will also have greater aspirations and it is important we bear that in mind and encourage and enable ambition.

Individuals should be at the centre of the transition model with their distinct needs and aspirations taken into account along with the right preparation time and support.

To do otherwise is to focus on systems and processes that reinforce a culture of dependence. Rather, we should build habits of independence and personal responsibility that fit with the broader shifts we see emerging in Service life, such as the Future Accommodation Model and the New Employment Model.

That shift in the balance of responsibilities in other aspects of military life needs to be complemented by a re-thinking of the transition model. There is a requirement to encourage and support a career-long approach that enables individuals to ‘own’ their transition and draw on as much or as little advice and support as they personally need. We are starting to see positive developments in this area, such as the MOD policy that requires all serving personnel to gain a qualification during their Service²⁸.

²⁸. https://gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/812946/JSP822

Support built around the individual

Much has been written about who has responsibility for ensuring a successful transition from a military to a civilian life, but much less has been written about personal responsibility. The individual joining the Armed Forces today must be reminded from the very start of their training and throughout their career that one day – no matter how far in the future it may seem – they will leave, and return to being a civilian. This highlights a paradox between an Armed Force rightly focussed on operational output, while encouraging an individual to look ahead and plan for a successful transition when the time comes to leave. The MOD recognises this as a challenge, however this contradiction remains, both for the employer and the employee.

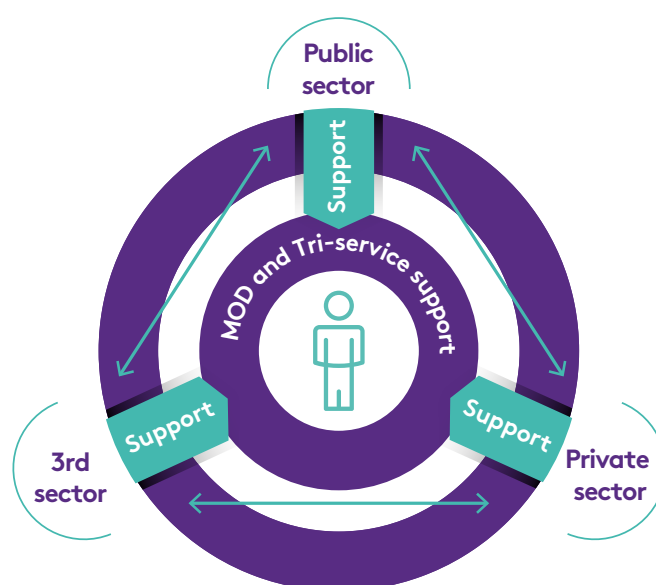
Individuals have the biggest stake in their transition journey and no matter their age, rank, ability or length of Service, they need to own it, do the research for it and start planning early. That means engaging fully while serving to prepare well and being appropriately equipped for an eventual life outside the military. It also means exploring and learning about local labour market opportunities, recognising where suitable jobs or opportunities to learn or set up in business or self-employment are located, and taking full advantage of opportunities to up-skill or re-skill and get or plan for any support needed while still serving.

Probably the most important question anyone considering leaving the Armed Forces has to ask themselves is 'what will I do now?' Whether medically discharged before completing basic training or coming to the end of a career which has spanned several decades, this fundamental question is relevant to all Service leavers. Of course, not all Service leavers are the same. Far from it. Inevitably, some will find it harder than others to make a successful transition. All will face challenges during their transition journey.

Preparation for transition is vital and can be the difference between a veteran getting the right job or not. Failing to prepare can mean choice is limited and job quality lower, including pay, terms and conditions and work life balance. Ultimately, that is reflected in living standards and quality of life. As and when we emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic we can expect employment to become more precarious, with further job losses or a reduction in income and hours being the reality for many. Therefore, it has never been more important for Service leavers to plan and prepare well and make the most of the support on offer.

During my many conversations with statutory services, individual veterans, and a variety of military and non-military organisations, I have heard time and again that getting a job is key to a successful transition. But what kind of a job, or is any job better than no job? Possibly, in the current uncertain climate when there are bills to be paid and a family to support, but is this really what we want for our Service leavers? This may be a short term necessity or a stepping stone towards a longer-term goal but should not stand in the way of aspiration and future success.

Getting the 'right job' or career as opposed to getting 'a' job should be what all Service leavers aim for and the individual has a responsibility to themselves to decide what he or she wants to do when they leave and work towards that as a goal. Self-employment, owning a business or further learning are also options. Service leavers should be encouraged in their aspirations for the future by the MOD as their employer, their chain of command, and by transition and resettlement officers and guidance practitioners they come into contact with. That requires transition thinking and planning to be introduced early in a Service career, rather than triggered by the resettlement process towards the end, when it is often too late for the Service leaver to make the most of the support that is offered.



Veterans 'selling themselves short'

In terms of securing paid employment, I have heard anecdotally from employers large and small that Service leavers are sometimes their own worst enemy. This is backed up by a recent report *Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Employment after leaving the UK Armed Forces*²⁹ commissioned by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT). The report identifies the key barriers to SNCOs making a successful employment transition and provides recommendations on how they can be best supported. It states that this particular cohort:

“often find it harder to make a successful transition into civilian employment than other veterans and face a number of challenges during their transition journey”.

Conditioned throughout their military careers to think in terms of ‘us’ and ‘teamwork’, rather than ‘me’, Service leavers can sometimes struggle when writing CVs, competing at interviews and ultimately securing employment because they fail to portray themselves in a way that is confident and fair, based on their achievements, skills, or potential. They can also struggle to convey the relevance of qualifications gained while serving. We have yet to see the evidence or full impact, but it appears that the Coronavirus pandemic will magnify barriers facing young people in general getting into work, education or training. I fear that for many Service leavers, especially for those leaving early, any future goals they may have had, may now seem so much more challenging to achieve.

Service leavers often have many of the attributes which make successful entrepreneurs or small business owners, yet those options and that of self-employment are often overlooked by current support systems which tend to focus on helping Service leavers secure paid employment. In the current economic climate, it may be that the prospect of paid employment seems more attractive than the riskier option of ‘going it alone’. However, we should avoid making assumptions, and as this may be a realistic choice for some, **the self-employment option should feature more prominently in advice, guidance and support offered.**

The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)³⁰ and Skills Development Scotland (SDS)³¹ offer support and help raise awareness of the benefits of self-employment and owning a business amongst ex-forces personnel. They work closely with X-Forces Enterprise³² who provide a range of courses and workshops for those in the military and ex-military communities, including spouses and dependants, who are considering self-employment. Specifically in Scotland, Business Gateway³³ has been flagged up to me as an excellent, and free, service for those considering self-employment or business ownership.

29. <https://www.fim-trust.org/Senior NCOs and Employment after leaving the UK Armed Forces>

30. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=federationofsmallbusinesses+scotland>

31. <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

32. <https://www.x-forces.com/>

33. <https://www.bgateway.com/>

It concerns me that veterans may be selling themselves short when considering Higher and Further Education or training. Some veterans may think that further learning or training is not for them, but this is far from the case, as I hope to show when I return to this topic later in the report. Serving personnel and veterans should be encouraged to look at education and training as viable options which can be used as a stepping stone to gain the necessary qualifications to work towards their long term goals. A good example is the MOD's policy of ensuring all serving personnel gain a qualification during Service. Many will now leave with an apprenticeship that they can make use of in the civilian world, others may achieve an academic or vocational qualification, or embark on a training course as part of their plan to up-skill for a particular career path they are set on. I would like to see more of this sort of initiative.



Access to high quality advice and guidance, informed by labour market information

Whatever path Service leavers seek on leaving the military, it is clear that they need to have the correct information to make an informed choice that is right for them. They need to be able to draw on that information and on as much or as little support and funding available as they personally need. Information needs to be easily accessible and include up-to-date labour market intelligence down to local level. This will be important in terms of decisions on where to settle, on qualifications and skills required and how to up-skill or re-skill for specific opportunities. Armed with the right information to make an informed choice, some may decide that remaining in the military is the more attractive option. At the very least, having comprehensive and accurate information should help them consider issues such as pay, terms and conditions, and career opportunities in the civilian world of work, before deciding on their future path.

The Careers Transition Partnership (CTP)³⁴ has been the official provider of Armed Forces Resettlement support for those leaving any of the three Services for over 20 years. Most serving personnel will be connected to CTP for high quality advice, guidance and information. In addition, Service leavers looking to settle in Scotland can look to Skills Development Scotland (SDS)³⁵ for advice and support. SDS is Scotland's national skills body, supporting individuals and businesses to develop and apply their skills through on-line and high street based careers information, guidance and advice. This service is available to all individuals in Scotland, throughout life. Unfortunately, many Service leavers are completely unaware of what SDS can do for them, their partner or family and so do not make use of their support and services.

SDS needs to be more effectively promoted to veterans and to those Service leavers and their families who are considering settling in Scotland. Once they are made aware of SDS, they need to take full advantage of the tools, advice and support on offer. SDS can complement and potentially extend the CTP information, advice and guidance 'offer' and provide important links into other sources of professional advice and support an individual may benefit from.

Service leavers also need to be made aware of the many other organisations who may have no connection to the military, but nevertheless provide an excellent source of knowledge and advice to those entering the jobs market. They are the experts in this field and can often set someone on a positive pathway that an individual may never have considered. They can provide information and advice on career options, the jobs market and how to successfully navigate through it. Service leavers and their partners need to engage with these organisations and take full advantage of the help and advice they have to offer. For that to happen awareness-raising needs to improve, along with signposting to the organisation who can provide the most appropriate support for them.

³⁴.<https://www.ctp.org.uk/>

³⁵.<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

Building Confidence

Service personnel are by and large confident individuals, but that confidence when in uniform does not always translate across to a civilian working environment. Confidence and career prospects can also be dented by disappointment, delay and poor advice. On a recent visit to RAF Lossiemouth I spoke to a number of Service leavers who told me it took them three or more jobs before settling on the career which was right for them in the first place. If individuals are in a job they are overqualified for, this career delay can be detrimental to both the individual and to the wider economy. Considered thought over time, along with planning and preparation to explore options and opportunities before leaving the Armed Forces might avoid some of this.

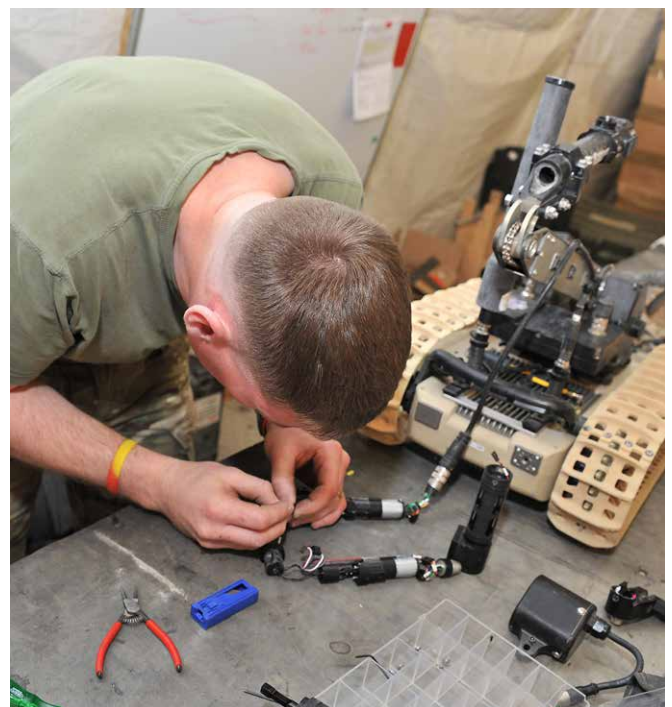
I want to ensure the conditions are such that individuals are enabled and supported to take greater responsibility for their own learning and development and transition planning when in uniform. This can best be set through the flexible, integrated and person-centred transition model I described earlier. The model would see transition thinking become an integral part of a military career, revisited, refreshed and reinforced regularly.

Service leavers must have confidence in themselves and in the value of their qualifications and experience gained while serving.

They must be prepared and ready to promote themselves to potential employers and able to articulate their qualifications to civilian employers and learning institutions. To help translate military confidence into civilian confidence, the three Services need to help serving personnel in realising that almost everything they do and learn in the Armed Forces will have a value when they leave, and to encourage their aspirations, planning and preparation.

For some individuals, additional support, advice or encouragement may be needed at certain points in their transition journey and the transition model needs to be flexible in order to offer this. Additional one-to-one mentoring or coaching may be beneficial either to build confidence or augment general careers guidance and advice. It could also be specific to a particular career choice or training pathway. I am aware that CTP seeks to provide the former but are limited by resource and contractual constraints.

Once in civilian employment some veterans benefit from job specific mentoring that exists within many larger organisations, like BT Openreach, Police Scotland and RBS. They will often appoint 'buddies' or mentors, or have networks within their organisations for their new ex-service employees. If more businesses in Scotland, in both the public and private sectors were to engage with CTP, this could happen not only when a Service leaver steps into the civilian world of work, but also in the lead up to that point. This would help individuals as they make important choices and start to forge connections in what will be a completely different working environment for many.



Spouse/partner employment and support

Finding a job in civilian life is not only a concern for individual Service leavers, but often for their partner too. Some may have been able to continue their career during their partner's time in the military, throughout transition and into civilian life. But for the majority, their own 'career' may have consisted of a variety of low paid temporary jobs, due to the cost and lack of appropriate childcare, deployments, frequent postings and lack of family support. They may have traditionally relied on an ad-hoc arrangement of services and support which can be hard to access, disjointed and often only known about via word of mouth.

Military spouses and partners are a largely untapped source of talent which Scottish businesses and the economy stand to benefit from, but who have not as yet been able to access the sort of transition support offered to their serving partner. Yet, extending CTP's job-finding services to spouses was a key recommendation in the Ashcroft Review as long ago as 2014³⁶. It led to the MOD's Spouse Employment Support Trial, which was evaluated by Forces in Mind Trust³⁷.

The report suggested:

“a clear evidential trail that providing spousal employment support ultimately results in better transition outcomes for the Service leaver and their family”.

Since then, other than some limited Service specific local support, we have seen very little to support spouses and partners seeking employment, training or learning opportunities. However, in November 2020, CTP commenced a six-month online Partner Career Support Programme³⁸ for spouses and partners of members of the Armed Forces. While this is excellent news, the pilot programme is just that and has a number of limitations. It is restricted to 750 spaces which are only available to individuals whose partner has been serving for at least four years and has not submitted a notice of termination or is not less than two years from ending their military engagement. Nevertheless, this is a welcome step in the right direction.

“The Service Families of today are the Service leavers' families of tomorrow and the veteran families of the future. As such, 'transition' is the common denominator between the Armed Forces Covenant, the Families' Strategy and the Veterans' Strategy. Helping families make more successful transitions, based on genuine options, may help them avoid making sub-optimal choices, which can re-emerge as problems tomorrow.”

– Tri-service research report by the Naval, Army and RAF Families Federations “Lifting the Lid on Transition: The families' experience and the support they need” - (FiMT) 2019³⁹.

³⁶. <http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/vtrreport.pdf>

³⁷. https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Spouse-Employment-report_FINAL.pdf#page=1

³⁸. <https://www.ctp.org.uk/partner-programme>

³⁹. <https://aff.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Transition-Final-Report-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>

Conclusion

Ultimately, responsibility for a successful transition to civilian life rests with the individual. Our servicemen and women need to be more ambitious and confident of their abilities to secure meaningful, high quality jobs when they leave. They must be better supported and encouraged in this by those with statutory responsibilities. – Service leavers must also recognise that their families are an integral part of their transition journey, and as such should also expect access to support, advice and guidance.

Recommendation

- **Serving personnel and veterans need to take responsibility for their transition. They need to 'own it', fully engage in it and embrace the support on offer throughout their military career and beyond. That means they:**
 - **need to be empowered to do that.** They should be prepared for a career beyond the military, well informed to make the right choices for them – whatever their aspirations for the future.
 - **must be able to draw on clear, easily accessible advice and guidance,** informed by labour market intelligence, including additional coaching and mentoring for those who would benefit.
 - **need to be confident and able to articulate their qualifications and experience effectively to employers and learning institutions.** In a highly competitive jobs market, recognition and understanding of military qualifications by potential employers is vital.
 - **must be aware that their families are an integral part of their transition journey.** Spouses and partners should be able to access appropriate support, advice and guidance before, during and after the Service leaver has exited the military.

The Statutory Sector – which informs, supports and enables

If the individual is ultimately responsible for his or her own transition, then the conditions in which they take that responsibility must be right. These conditions are ultimately set by the transition model adopted by the statutory bodies who play a critical part in the transition journey.

This section of the report considers the role of those statutory bodies and offers suggestions and recommendations where improvements can be made. It highlights the challenges some statutory organisations have in the devolved space and offers a reminder of the importance of working together across jurisdictions for the benefit of our veterans.

It is worth highlighting those organisations that have statutory responsibility for those veterans in Scotland. First is the MOD. Through its authoritative Joint Service Publications JSP 534 and JSP 100, the MOD lays out its responsibility for the preparation of individuals to become veterans. Of particular note is the critical part in the transition process of the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). Delivered under contract, the CTP acts as the key provider for resettlement support and also acts as an intermediary service for employers seeking to hire Service leavers. CTP effectively acts as the “front of house” for the MOD and is therefore critical to the transition journey.

Recognising that services for veterans can often be “disjointed, hard to access at times and focussed on short-term inputs”, in 2019 the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) was set up within the Cabinet Office. It was given an express role of championing veterans’ interests at the heart of government and of holding Ministers across Whitehall to account in delivering better outcomes for veterans. The OVA aims to work in partnership with the devolved administrations, local authorities and the wider public, private and third sectors across all parts of the UK to deliver the lifelong support our veterans deserve. The creation of the OVA is very welcome and will play an important part in the interactions between the UK and Scottish Governments when considering the challenges of devolution and the shared responsibility it creates.

The UK and Scottish Governments, the MOD and the Office for Veterans Affairs all have a major stake in transition and have committed to address current barriers to successful transition. In the new economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, they may now need to ‘up their game,’ to re-think the transition model, empower individuals and re-examine their offerings if they are to deliver on the outcomes set out in the Strategy for our Veterans.

Responsibility to support seamless transition by ensuring barriers are addressed and that no one is disadvantaged in the employment market for having spent time in the Armed Forces is shared across different organisations. Much of this work will cut across different departments or even different governments.

Statutory bodies with a key role to play in informing, supporting and enabling individuals settling in Scotland in their transition journey include:

- **Scottish Government and its partners** – responsible for the delivery of devolved services to veterans choosing to live in Scotland, including, health, social care, housing, education and skills development.
- **Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)** – the UK’s biggest public service department responsible for welfare benefits, pensions and child maintenance policy.
- **Social Security Scotland** – the new agency which will be responsible for certain benefits in Scotland, including: ill health and disability benefits, Discretionary Housing Payments and Carers’ Allowance.
- **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)** – Scotland’s National Skills Agency which supports individuals and businesses to develop and apply their skills. SDS provides on-line and high street careers information, guidance and advice.
- **Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE)** – delivered by Skills Development Scotland, PACE is the Scottish Government’s initiative for supporting people dealing with redundancy.
- **The Scottish Funding Council (SFC)** – the national, strategic body responsible for funding teaching and learning provision, research and other activities in Scotland’s higher and further education institutes.
- **SCQF Partnership** – which manages the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework to improve understanding and recognition of learning and qualifications in Scotland.
- **Business Gateway** – provides free support and guidance to businesses and individuals across Scotland, including 1 to 1 local advice, support webinars, advice on funding and business information.



Recent developments

In the two years since taking up appointment as Scotland's Veterans Commissioner I have seen some excellent examples of developments or improvements in action to support veterans' transition into employment, skills development or learning. They include:

- **The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)** is to be commended for their ongoing work in aligning military qualifications to civilian frameworks, thus ensuring veterans are better able to articulate their qualifications and enabling employers to understand them. More details about this vitally important work can be found here scqf.org.uk/support-for-veterans/.
- **Skills Development Scotland (SDS)** has risen to the challenge from a position 3 years ago when they did not have any specific Armed Forces or veterans support, to now having a tailored offering to Service leavers and a Veterans Champion in each of their five regional areas. Their online pages - My World of Work⁴⁰ includes specific support for Service leavers and veterans.
- **DWP Armed Forces Champions** - UK Government funding in 2019 allowed DWP to fund more than 100 'Armed Forces Champion' posts, within existing Jobcentres. These Champions deliver employment support and benefits advice to former Service personnel, and raise awareness of particular issues faced by veterans and their families. Many of the Jobcentre staff who are Armed Forces Champions have previously served in the Armed Forces themselves and draw upon their own experiences to help veterans move forward.
- The UK Government's proposed **National Insurance Contribution 12 month 'holiday'** for employers taking on a veteran. Intended to incentivise employers to hire veterans and boost pay and opportunities, an HMRC consultation on the practicalities closed on 5 October 2020 with a potential implementation date set for April 2021⁴¹.
- Other, more recent initiatives, are intended to alleviate the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the labour market. While not specifically aimed at veterans, they will undoubtedly be of benefit to many working age veterans:
- The UK Government's **Kickstart** Scheme which provides funding to employers to create job placements for 16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit.
- The Scottish Government's **Youth Guarantee** which will ensure everyone aged between 16 and 24 has the opportunity of work, education or training.
- The **National Transition Training Fund**⁴² which enables anyone aged 25 or over, currently under threat of redundancy, or who has been made redundant from 1 March 2020 to access an industry recognised qualification to help them gain employment.

Government interventions like these need to be promoted more widely to serving personnel, veterans and their families.

Amongst others, the UK and Scottish Governments, the MOD, CTP and the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA), all have a major stake in transition and have committed to address current barriers to successful transition. In the new economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, they may now need to 'up their game,' to re-think the transition model, empower individuals and re-examine their offering if they are to deliver on the outcomes set out in the UK-wide Strategy for Our Veterans.

40. <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/support-armed-forces-leavers-and-veterans>

41. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/supporting-veterans-transition-to-civilian-life-through-employment>

42. <https://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/national-transition-training-fund>

What needs to improve?

After comprehensive discussions and investigation, I have concluded that there are broadly seven areas that those responsible for delivering statutory services for our veterans may wish to concentrate on when considering improvements to transition in the area of employment, skills and learning:

- **Better collaboration in the preparation space** to help prepare Service leavers seeking to settle in Scotland
- **More flexible transition support** designed round the individual to cater for the individual requirements Service leavers face
- Addressing the specific challenges of **young or Early Service Leavers (ESLs)**
- **Improving understanding of military skills and qualifications** in Scotland
- Straightforward **information on funding for further learning or training** and a more streamlined and flexible system of **Enhanced Learning Credits**
- Reach out to, and build better connections with, **the business community**
- **Include the family** (specifically the spouse or partner) in all transition activity

Many barriers and challenges stem from the current cluttered and confusing landscape. There is a plethora of support available but we need to simplify the 'support offer', remove duplication and present it much more clearly and proactively. I think the key to addressing many issues faced by the statutory sector is to encourage closer collaboration across and between governments and delivery agencies. Many 3rd sector organisations tend to be swifter to react than central government departments where politics or bureaucracy can often get in the way. However, there is no doubt that each could learn from the other.

The Strategy for our Veterans is an excellent (and relatively rare) example of governments and administrations coming together across the UK and collaborating to produce a long-term Strategy document. The Scottish Government has now published its report *Taking the Strategy forward in Scotland*, and progress on delivery is reported annually to the Scottish Parliament by the Scottish Veterans Minister. By delivering on the Strategy outcomes, many of the issues affecting veterans in all areas of their transition journey could be addressed. I hope the work to deliver the objectives within the Strategy continues even in these challenging times, and we do not look back in years to come at a wasted opportunity to make the changes needed to get things right for our veterans' community.



The preparation space

Although there will be some limited crossover in interests, in general, the MOD, the three Services and the statutory organisations mentioned can be split into two categories:

- **Those who have a specific responsibility for developing policy and support relevant to those leaving the Armed Forces**
- **Those who develop policy and deliver services relevant to the Service leaver once in the civilian world of work.**

There is also what I see as an often overlooked 'grey area', where UK and devolved government interests and responsibilities overlap. This is most acute in preparation for transition, which is so important. Traditionally this has been a space occupied by the MOD and the single Services, who have by convention, put processes and systems first, rather than focussing on outcomes and designed around the individual. If we are to avoid disjointed policy and service delivery across the UK, it is crucial that those developing and designing transition policy do not do so in isolation. Broader, closer collaboration between central and devolved governments and administrations is the only way we can ensure local delivery circumstances are reflected in policy and service design. Greater collaboration and a focus on the individual in this preparation space is the way to achieve more positive outcomes for our veterans and their families. Third sector organisations also make a huge contribution here and I will say more on their vital and valued role later in the report.

What all these organisations have in common is a responsibility to inform (and where necessary support) serving personnel, Service leavers, veterans, and their families of the opportunities and choices available to them during their transition journey. However, the 'support offer' is often determined by criteria such as length of Service, and when it's sought. This can be confusing and off-putting to potential users and is far from the seamless and flexible support offer required in a transition model fit for today. If we are to move away from the current cluttered and confusing landscape these organisations need to work together and with third sector providers. They need to collaborate to improve and simplify the 'support offer', remove duplication and present it much more clearly as a key component of a fresh transition model. A more flexible and accessible model will not only better serve the next generation of Service leavers and their families, but may also contribute to economic recovery in the wake of the pandemic.

Flexible Support designed around the individual

As I see it, the main challenge for all statutory bodies is to be more flexible, more aware and more proactive to ensure that today's Service leavers are properly prepared and supported with the tools they need for a successful transition. By proactive, I mean they will sometimes need to reach out to individuals, encourage them to engage and offer more support to those who need it. For this to happen, support services need to be designed around the individual – who needs to be put at the centre of any transition offer. Service leavers must be given the appropriate information so they are best placed to get a job that is right not only for their skills and experience, but also for their personal aspirations and ambitions. This may be paid employment but may also include further or higher education or training or self-employment. Crucially, they must be made aware of what help and advice is available and how to access this.

The support organisation that Service leavers will most commonly come into contact with is the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP). At the Regional Resettlement Centres CTP run a variety of programmes to support a wide range of needs. Typically, because CTP support is triggered by the Resettlement process (during the last 2 years of Service), individuals can sometimes fail to engage in any transition thinking, planning or research until it is too late to take full advantage of opportunities to up-skill and re-skill while still in the Services. Failing to research the kinds of jobs available within an area they are considering settling can mean losing out on better employment prospects or business opportunities that may otherwise have been open to them. That can have an impact on life chances for many years to come.

According to CTP's latest figures, published in February 2020⁴³ '86% of people who access help from CTP are in employment six months after leaving the military.' However, this undoubtedly impressive figure does not show what job an individual may be in and whether it is really the right job for them. Veterans may have had to accept a job with lower pay, conditions and prospects in order to secure any employment to pay the bills and may have missed opportunities that would have been open to them with adequate preparation. Decisions on what is right for an individual or their partner need to be an informed choice, driven by full and up-to-date information.

Service leavers need to be informed decision makers and that includes learning about local labour market conditions and knowing where suitable jobs or opportunities are located. It means knowing whether their skill sets are transferable to the civilian labour market and if not, what skills are required to be successful in securing those jobs and how to go about obtaining them. None of that can be done at the last minute or as often the case, in a short Resettlement course, which for many, can take place in a different part of the UK to where they are looking to settle. CTP and other bodies need to help by supplying labour market information to let individuals see whether their skill sets are transferable to local labour market requirements. If not, it can show them where the gaps are and what they may need to do to up-skill or re-skill.

Research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD) found that almost half of UK workers are in jobs they are either under- or over-skilled for. Their 2018 report *Over-skilled and underused: Investigating the untapped potential of UK skills*⁴⁴ found that over a third of workers have the skills to cope with more demanding duties than they currently have. While these numbers may now have changed, the following is still relevant.

"How skills are used, or not used, in the workplace has important economic and social implications, and is a key factor in tackling the productivity crisis."

– Lizzie Crowley, Skills Adviser at the CIPD.

⁴³. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/Career Transition Partnership](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/Career%20Transition%20Partnership)

⁴⁴. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/over-skilled-and-underused-investigating-the-untapped-potential-of-uk-skills_tcm18-48001.pdf

Addressing the specific challenges of Early Service Leavers (ESLs)

In addition to the statutory support currently offered by CTP, in 2019 the MOD launched Defence Transition Services⁴⁵, which provides an extra level of support specifically aimed at those individuals facing significant barriers to a successful transition. The service, which emerged from the MOD's Defence Holistic Transition Policy (set out in JSP 100) was billed as '*a new approach to how we seek to reintegrate our people into civilian life*'. Significantly, for the first time it included families as equal partners in preparing for transition. However, it is probably too early to see to what extent more vulnerable Service leavers (and their partners) in Scotland are now contacting DTS for help with employment issues, and what impact the new service has had.

As I said in my Positive Futures paper of 2019,

"More support, not less, is needed for Early Service Leavers (ESLs) – especially if they leave at short notice."

Specifically, more tailored support for ESLs is needed to reduce the disadvantages this younger cohort may experience when trying to get into employment, further learning or training. We know that the same group are the least likely to engage in support and for some the rapid nature of their discharge from the Services makes preparation impossible. The situation they face is likely to be exacerbated by much tougher labour market conditions, with younger workers likely to bear the brunt of employment difficulties stemming from the pandemic. These young people are at risk of long-term unemployment and reduced life chances as they step out of uniform and into an uncertain future.

The Future Horizons Programme, delivered by the RFEA, the Forces Employment Charity, with the support of CTP, does offer specific support to ESLs and all ESLs should be registered with the programme automatically when they are discharged. However, this offer, alongside other available support, should be examined and tested to ensure that ESLs settling in Scotland are afforded the best chance of sustained success. Therefore, I suggest that CTP and SDS should work in partnership to look afresh at the provision of additional wraparound support service for ESLs settling in Scotland, including reducing barriers such as funding and confusing sign-posting.

⁴⁵. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-service-to-provide-enhanced-support-to-personnel-leaving-the-military>

Understanding military skills and qualifications

Key to getting a good job is having the right qualifications and experience. For too long, too many of our Service leavers have faced difficulties translating their skills and qualifications into the civilian workplace, and civilian employers still don't fully understand or appreciate the transferable skills, competencies and experience ex-Service personnel have to offer them. Coupled with negative perceptions and stereotyping of veterans still common amongst some executives with hiring responsibilities, this creates yet another barrier to a successful transition.

Until very recently, UK military qualifications have only appeared on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) used in England and Wales. In Scotland we have the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which is used by learners, employers, colleges and universities across Scotland. Over the last few years, thanks to project funding by the Scottish Funding Council, Infantry, Royal Artillery, Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers and Royal Logistic Corps qualifications have been placed on their comparable levels on the SCQF. However, the pace of this work is slow, and will only take us so far, as long as new qualifications emerging⁴⁶ continue to be placed only on the RQF.

The Defence Awarding Organisation (DAO) awards vocational qualifications to Armed Forces personnel (Regular and Reserve) to recognise quality and competence gained through Defence training and experience. Currently, it supports the awarding of qualifications on the RQF *only* and does not routinely place qualifications on the SCQF. Until the DAO routinely places new qualifications on both frameworks, the SCQF will forever be playing 'catch-up'. With the possibility that those Service leavers and veterans choosing to settle in Scotland are put at a disadvantage.

I raised this long-running concern with the UK Minister for Defence People and Veterans earlier this year, who has assured me that the MOD is actively exploring resource options to expand the DAO team to allow it to do this and that the action is one of their top objectives. The alignment of military and civilian qualifications, allowing employers and learning organisations to see their relevance and value, and giving ex-Service personnel the best chance to compete in a much tougher labour market is work that needs to be completed. This has now been an issue for a number of years and we cannot afford to keep putting it off.



⁴⁶. Qualifications are accredited for a finite period. When a qualification reaches the end of its accreditation period, it may be withdrawn, extended or replaced by an updated qualification.

Better information on further learning or training, and funding

The Scottish Funding Council enables Scotland's colleges and universities to provide life-changing opportunities for over half a million people annually. Their work in widening access is bringing colleges and universities together in new ways and that includes providing Service leavers and veterans with more routes into further learning or training. Most of Scotland's universities and colleges now have dedicated Veterans and Armed Forces Champions. Their role is to ensure the academic institute is working towards fulfilling the pledges they agreed to when they signed the Armed Forces Covenant by helping remove disadvantage for veterans and their families who wish to enter further or higher education or training. Scotland also has a Higher and Further Education Veterans Champions Network, supporting individual Champions.

The Chair of the Veterans Champions Network, Jim Castle, a Lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University, tells me that:

“Veterans have what we want as educators and employers. The biggest barrier to progression is their inability to recognise and talk about their transferable and meta-skills . They will never say how good they are as individuals.”

The solution, Jim says, is to:

“Educate about education.” And for MOD, CPT and the FE and HE sector to work together to show veterans how to transfer their Military confidence into Educational confidence.

Not all veterans pursuing further qualifications will want to go into full time further or higher education in order to get a diploma or degree. Some may want to consider part time study or shorter-term training options in order to up-skill or re-skill to get the job they really want. For all Service leavers, I would encourage looking at learning as a journey or a pathway to get where you want to go. Universities, further education colleges and training providers can help you in this and can be stepping stones to maximising your potential.

An issue that may be preventing Service leavers considering further learning in their transition journey is funding, the lack of which can be seen as a major barrier to ambition and to making the best transition. It's an area which should be looked at afresh as part of the flexible, integrated and person-centred transition model I am recommending. The current situation was summed up nicely for me by a young ex-Royal Signals Corporal who I met during his work CTP placement with the Scottish Government, who told me:

“One thing I think would be really useful to all Service leavers is if CTP were to offer a financial factsheet outlining key information. Greater clarity on precise allowances for fees, grants and learning credits and how these can be used, along with points of contact for advice would be a really valuable resources during transition.”

A more flexible system of Enhanced Learning Credits

Currently, those leaving the military who have 6 years or more of eligible Service since April 2000 are entitled to apply for training or learning funds, known as Enhanced Learning Credits (ELC's). This provides financial support during the resettlement period for higher level learning, leading to a nationally recognised qualification.

While such support is of course very welcome, the multi-faceted system as it currently stands is confusing and administratively complex. Such inflexibility can put a course financially beyond the grasp of some, or lead to difficulties for those wishing to apply for a number of courses within a 12-month period. The eligibility rules are complex and depend on many factors which can exclude ESLs who may be at particular risk of a poor transition.

There is also an issue with the number of training providers registered in Scotland. A limited number of registered providers spread over a very large area means many veterans have to travel long distances to access the training they require or simply miss out. In addition, larger learning providers such as Universities who are registered, have encountered the bureaucracy of having to register and pay for each individual course they offer, sometimes amounting to hundreds of courses.

I am keen to see whether the ELCs Administrative Services, working with the Directorate of Training, Education, Skills, Recruiting and Resettlement (TESRR) in the MOD, can cut through some of the red tape which currently exists around ELCs and streamline the process, while also ensuring best fit with both the devolved space and with a more flexible transition model. With little in the way of flexibility in the current system, some Service leavers in Scotland are unable to fully benefit from what is otherwise an excellent scheme.



Addressing skills gaps and building better connections to the Business Community

Evidence shows that too many employers still do not sufficiently understand or appreciate the skills ex-Service personnel have to offer and fail to look to or embrace this source of talent. This is most recently backed in the report by GoodPeople and FiMT⁴⁷ *A Better Working Future for Ex-Service Personnel*. This is the case, despite well documented skill shortages and gaps that exist and the wider labour market challenges many sectors face in recruiting and retaining the right people. Although researched before the Coronavirus pandemic, the report clearly acknowledges that the conclusions it comes to will be more relevant and more important than ever in our recovery from the current economic crisis and with Brexit bringing a further set of labour market challenges.

Skills shortages and gaps seem to be permanent features of the Scottish economy and 4 years ago my predecessor made a recommendation to the Scottish Government to look at how the veterans' community could be utilised to fill known skills gaps in key sectors like education, health, IT, engineering, construction, finance and insurance. Some exploratory work has been done such as the mapping of military qualifications. This will help match Service leavers and veterans to vacancies in these sectors. Sectors of greatest need may have changed in the past 4 years but the need to better match the skills and expertise of veterans to where skills gaps, jobs and opportunities lie has not.

Cyber Security skills gap

One recent and promising example of an initiative to direct ex-Service personnel into an area where there is a known shortfall in skilled staff is the Scottish Government funded Abertay University pilot. In February 2020 SDS in partnership with SaluteMyJob and Abertay University, established a pilot project to upskill/reskill veterans and spouses into Cyber Security jobs. The aim of the 8 week course was to fill a business-critical shortage facing employers across the country. A full evaluation is awaited, but of the course, participant Richard Barratt, a former marine with 45 Commando in Arbroath, said:

"The support, guidance and advice in supporting my career transition into a cyber-role has been excellent and testament to the team's hard work and dedication. In addition, the opportunity and privilege of attending two of their courses has attracted the attention of several high profile organisations in my current search for a new role."

Graeme from Aberdeen added,

"Thanks so much again for all the support and everything that you are doing for us. Being noticed is amazing, but to have the SaluteMyJob team proactively pushing for you (and especially after a battle with PTSD) is just incredible. I couldn't convey my gratitude enough, even if I had a large dictionary and plenty of time."

⁴⁷. https://s31949.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/GP_BWF_A4-Report_v13-interactive-Web-copy.pdf.

Aside from the work required to better connect Service leavers and veterans to opportunities that exist in specific sectors with known skills shortages or gaps, there is a broader challenge in better connecting employers with potential ex-service employees more generally.

Employers still do not sufficiently understand or appreciate the skills ex-Service personnel have to offer. The October 2020 GoodPeople and FiMT report found employers, and SME employers in particular, are failing to engage the ex-Service community at scale. Of employer respondents some 33% reported their organisation found it difficult to engage with the ex-Service community. Yet, 69% of employer respondents said their organisation would be interested in exploring the benefits of a future model that provided access to and engagement of ex-Service talent.

We need to fuel interest in employing ex-Service personnel particularly amongst SMEs. Connections to the business community should be broadened and enhanced to ensure reach out to SMEs as potential employers but also as mentors to veterans looking to start their own business.

I am keen to see reach extended through local Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business Scotland to help their members see the veterans' community as a positive source of talent and part of the solution to their resourcing issues. There have been ad hoc attempts to do that, like the FSB's excellent report produced in partnership with X-Forces Enterprise, *A Force for Business*⁴⁸. However, beyond CTP there is no formal means that yet exists whereby employers can access, engage and hire ex-Service personnel or offer work experience or internships to those seeking employment. Nor is there a means to provide mentoring to those looking at setting up in self-employment or establishing their own small business.



Visit to RAF Lossiemouth in February 2020

48. <https://www.x-forces.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/A-Force-for-Business-Service-leavers-and-small-businesses.pdf>

Include the family in transition activity

A flexible, transition model needs to enable not only individuals but their families to also draw on 'the support offer'. The mobility that goes hand in hand with Service life can cause real difficulties for partners in sustaining stable employment or building a career.

A recent development in Government thinking in this area was Andrew Selous MP's report, *Living in our Shoes: Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families*⁴⁹. Commissioned by the then Defence Secretary, Selous made 110 recommendations for change in terms of military family life today and this led to the current refresh of the Armed Forces Families Strategy.

The Selous Review gathered consistent data about the difficulties and frustrations experienced by many non-serving partners in gaining and maintaining suitable employment and the barriers they face when trying to build their own career while part of the military community.



Selous stated:

"A military model based on a notion of a working father and a stay-at-home mother looking after her husband and her children, willing to go anywhere the Armed Forces require, whenever they require it, is no longer realistic. It is increasingly expected and financially necessary that both partners in military and civilian families will be in paid employment."

Selous made two very important recommendations in respect of transition and Service families. Firstly, he said that family members should be included in MOD transition and resettlement pathways before, during and after the Service leaver has exited the military. And secondly, that the MOD should continue to work with other government departments, the private and charity sectors, and the devolved governments to provide joined-up, consistent and seamless transition and resettlement processes for Service leavers and their partners. He concluded that:

"a clear evidential trail that providing spousal employment support ultimately results in better transition outcomes for the Service leaver and their family"

It is my hope that current work to refresh the 2016 Armed Forces Families Strategy in response to Selous, is only the beginning of a much broader change which will see transition and other support by statutory providers extended to partners and families and the improvements he set out in his recommendations delivered.

⁴⁹. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/Living_in_our_shoes

Conclusion

Getting statutory support right for all our Service leavers and their families is vital if we are not to overlook the transferable skills, talent and experience of ex-military personnel. The Coronavirus pandemic has shone a positive light on the skills and talents of our serving personnel and reservists, called to contribute in the health crisis. The public have witnessed first-hand the wide-ranging skills, flexibility and sheer professionalism of our Armed Forces. Qualities and characteristics that employers seek in their employees. By properly equipping our Service leavers through the right statutory support, we can help ensure they, and the wider economy benefit when they become a successful part of the civilian workforce.

Recommendations

- **Advice and support should be clearly sign-posted and promoted proactively.** It should be offered in a timely and accessible way and be backed by advice and guidance which is informed by the latest local labour market information and circumstances.
- **Work on the alignment of existing military and civilian qualifications in Scotland should be completed** and all new qualifications placed on both the RQF and SCQF frameworks as appropriate, to give veterans the best chance to compete for jobs when settling in Scotland.
- **Funding for further learning or training should be re-examined to simplify the 'offer'** and ensure ease of access and fit with the transition model for today. In addition, **ELCAS** learning credit support packages should be re-examined to ensure their fit with that more flexible model.
- **Statutory support should be extended to spouses and partners and additional 'wrap-around' packages considered for Early Service Leavers** and those struggling in a more competitive jobs market.
- **Connections to the business community should be broadened and enhanced** to ensure reach out to small and medium-sized enterprises as potential employers or as mentors to veterans looking to start their own business.

The Wider Community – which welcomes, supports and benefits

The final perspective through which I have considered transition, is the community. In many ways this is the most difficult aspect to articulate, as 'community' is a nebulous concept, which can mean different things to different people. However, for the purposes of this report, community incorporates employers and businesses, charities, social enterprises and other community organisations active, or who have an impact, at local level. All will have a bearing on how well veterans integrate back into civilian life in Scotland.

The Scottish Government recognises that the Armed Forces and veterans are assets to their local communities and to Scotland in general. Since it published *Our Commitments and Renewing our Commitments*⁵⁰ and appointed the first Veterans Commissioner in the UK in 2014, it has sought to support and champion our Armed Forces and veterans. While government has led the way, I think there is more which could be done at a local level. I would like to see the Scottish Government engaging with Local Authorities and Scottish businesses to proactively reach out to veterans and their families, ensuring they receive the recognition and support they deserve and actively encouraging them to choose Scotland as their destination of choice when leaving the Services.

When I speak to individual Service leavers there are some who are understandably anxious about returning to the civilian world. They are concerned they and their families will not be welcomed or understood by their new neighbours and the community they have chosen to settle in. This may stem from the fact that in recent times there has been less direct understanding in society of what it means to serve in our Armed Forces.

Earlier this year Rand published a report authored by Hew Strachan and Ruth Harris, entitled *The Utility of Military Force and Public Understanding in Today's Britain*⁵¹. The report talks about the need for social resilience and societal ownership which it says, rests on the integration of the Armed Forces within the community, and in particular on direct evidence of their contribution to security. If we as a society do not have an understanding of our Armed Forces, how can we understand our veterans who are a product of those Armed Forces?



Glasgow's Helping Heroes (GHH), part of SSAFA, the Armed Forces charity. GHH is a holistic service for veterans to help them integrate back into civilian life

⁵⁰. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/corporate-report/2016/02/renewing-commitments>

⁵¹. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA213-1.html

Changing communities/changing perceptions

Through developing MOD policies like the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) we are beginning to see Service personnel and their families given greater lifestyle choices and more opportunity to live in the community rather than in Service Accommodation. FAM is being piloted in 3 areas at the moment, including one at HMNB Clyde, however it will take time to see the impact of this change. Until greater choice of accommodation and where to live becomes the norm for serving personnel, most of our civilian communities will not have direct experience or see the advantages of having both serving and ex-Service personnel living among them.

The Coronavirus pandemic has increased visibility of the military working in the UK with the public seeing directly the value and expertise serving and ex-Service personnel have to offer. During the course of the initial lockdown and the tightest restrictions to our daily lives, the public saw all three Services working alongside the NHS, using planning, logistics and other skills and capabilities to organise the distribution of critical PPE, to help man testing centres and help build the field hospitals in Glasgow and other parts of the UK. During this critical time and as the pandemic has evolved, veterans have also been volunteering their skills and talents to aid the national effort. However, a lack - or perceived lack - of understanding across the civilian population in general persists. Addressing this is an enormous challenge. There is no 'silver bullet' and it will likely take years before we see any meaningful change.

A shift in public perception and the current focus on the positive qualities our Armed Forces personnel and veterans bring to society are developments we can capitalise on over time. However, for the time being, low levels of public understanding are still reflected in the workplace, with employers and businesses often harbouring negative perceptions about veterans and how they might fit into a civilian working culture.

A 2019 YouGov survey⁵² for the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) revealed that 18% of executives with hiring responsibilities would discriminate against veterans due to "negative perceptions" of their former careers. Of those surveyed, 44% believed that veterans do not have the relevant skills or experience for civilian roles, 19% claimed that veterans would not fit into workplace culture and 18% that skills from active duty may not translate into a business environment. Yet we know that veterans have a wealth of transferable skills and talent that businesses can utilise and all of us who work in the veterans sector have a responsibility to showcase their attributes and acknowledge their successes. We need to increase awareness and understanding among civilian employers of how Service leavers' skills fit their recruitment needs if we are to help veterans find fulfilling employment and ensure employers do not miss out on this source of talent.

52. <https://www.fim-trust.org/news-policy-item/veterans-face-negative-stereotypes-when-applying-for-jobs/>



Support into work or business

I have said that for the majority of veterans the key to a successful transition means securing a meaningful and fulfilling career or job when they leave. Any internet search will quickly show the plethora of groups and organisations willing and able to help veterans and their families secure that job or career. The difficult part is to ensure Service leavers know that advice and support is there to help them make an informed choice, whether that is a job, self-employment, higher or further education or training. I have outlined the statutory support available in earlier sections of this report. However, there are also many non-statutory organisations who also provide advice and information, sometimes in collaboration and sometimes as a stand-alone service or under contract to the statutory sector.

Examples include: Poppy Scotland's LifeWorks course and their Employ-Able service⁵³, X-Forces Enterprise⁵⁴, SaluteMyJob⁵⁵, Forces Recruitment solutions⁵⁶, Veterans Employment Transition Support Programme⁵⁷, and RFEA—the forces employment charity⁵⁸ who all offer help and support both during and after transition to those entering the labour market. Increasingly these 'support offers' are more tailored and are being extended to partners of serving personnel and veterans.

Furthermore, over the past few years I have seen the Scottish business community, including the representative bodies and business organisations⁵⁹, starting to show a greater interest in the positive source of talent that our veterans represent and which flows from the Services year on year. We need to capitalise on this. Employers, and in particular SMEs need to engage the ex-Service community proactively and at much greater scale. Representative bodies can help them do that.

⁵³. <https://www.poppyscotland.org.uk/get-help/employment>

⁵⁴. <https://www.x-forces.com/>

⁵⁵. <https://www.salutemyjob.com/>

⁵⁶. <https://www.forcesrecruitment.co.uk/>

⁵⁷. <https://www.veteranemployment.co.uk/>

⁵⁸. <https://www.rfea.org.uk/>

⁵⁹. Federation of Small Business, CBI (Scotland), Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Business Gateway, local Chambers of Commerce

Building local links and connections

Breaking down barriers between veterans and the community they have chosen to settle in is important for a successful transition. For some Service leavers, they may already have a house in the local area, their spouse or partner may be employed in the local economy, their children attend local schools and thus in an ideal world these barriers will have started to break down naturally and the move into the civilian world will be much less daunting. While employment is an important way of building local connections, there are other ways of successfully integrating into a community. Hobbies, clubs, sports, the arts, and volunteering can all provide pathways for veterans and their families to feel part of their new community. I am pretty sure that whatever a veteran, his/her partner or children are interested in, they will find likeminded people within their local community who will be willing to welcome them.

Another example aimed at breaking down barriers between military and civilian populations are Military Co-working Hubs. Pioneered at Leuchars and now with a two year pilot programme being funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust, these shared office spaces are a way of allowing civilians, in particular local employers, to meet and engage with those living on military bases in their area.

Military Co-Working Hubs

Military Co-working Hubs are shared office spaces located on or near military bases. They are places for non-serving members of the military community to go and work. They exist to foster, champion and support the identities, lives and careers of individuals and to enable a culture of business entrepreneurialism within the military community. The hubs also provide a doorway for civilians to walk through; an entry point to allow employers and members of local communities to meet, talk and engage with the people living on the military bases in their towns and villages.

In Scotland there is currently one Hub open in Leuchars and one due to open in Helensburgh.



The Veterans Dumfries Garden & Breakfast Club in March 2020

By strengthening links and forging connections at a local level between the military and civilian communities, a greater understanding from both sides can develop. Some organisations and groups I see as key in these areas and which I wish to mention are:

Firm Base

Providing a strong link between the Armed Forces community, the local civilian community and the Scottish Government is the advisory Firm Base Forum and Firm Base Forum Working Groups. These forums are designed to discuss matters of policy and strategy relating to the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant in Scotland and to provide direction and guidance to those involved in the delivery of services. They are at the top of a governance framework that reaches through Local Authorities, Health Boards and Community Task Forces to local communities, individual military units and veterans groups.

Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations

First established in 1908 the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCAs) were originally designed to provide local support to the Territorial Force in every county in the UK. Over 100 years later the RFCA has grown to encompass reserves and cadets of all 3 Services. There are 13 associations across the UK with two in Scotland; Highland RFCA and Lowland RFCA. Each association has a responsibility for the wellbeing of their region's Reserve Forces and cadets, promoting the interests of the Armed Forces in general, and playing a key part in building relationships with the local community and employers.

Armed Forces and Veterans Champions

Every Local Authority and NHS board in Scotland plus many other organisations such as Universities and colleges, and the Department for Work and Pensions now has an Armed Forces and Veterans Champion. They are officials within their organisations who have volunteered to support veterans in their area who have problems getting the support they need. They encourage local communities, including employers, to support and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the Armed Forces community. I would like to see their role strengthened, as although there are some outstanding examples of Champions working in their communities, there are still many parts of Scotland where the role has not really developed in the way I had envisaged. Working more closely with the Firm Base forums and working groups is one way the Champions role can be developed to really reach out into the community to proactively and consistently welcome and involve veterans and their families.

These are some examples of organisations working hard at a local level to help change attitudes towards, and improve understanding of, Armed Forces and veterans. Changing attitudes is not easy, it takes time and results can be slow to be seen. While progress has been made, the energy has to be kept up as the job is not done. It is incumbent on us all to do so. In particular, the Scottish Government has a vital role to play here in continuing to set the right conditions by speaking positively and highlighting the attributes and talents of Service leavers to employers.



Veteran Gary Jamieson who works as an operator at SBMC

Community Engagement and Social Enterprise

Research shows that when communities feel empowered, there is:

- greater participation in local democracy
- increased confidence and skills among local people
- more people volunteering in their communities
- greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood

Playing an important role in empowering local communities are Social Enterprises. These are businesses with a social or environmental purpose, whose profits are re-invested into fulfilling their mission. As well as empowering communities, they can tackle social problems, and create jobs - particularly for people who are at a disadvantage in the standard jobs market.

I understand there are roughly five and a half thousand Social Enterprise schemes across Scotland, which are supported by the Scottish Government's Social Enterprise Strategy 2016–2026⁶¹. One particular example I have had the privilege of seeing first hand, is Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company⁶², a Social Enterprise near Glasgow producing signage for use across a range of industries, including highways, transport and the commercial sector. They support ex-Service personnel by providing them with the opportunity to use the skills acquired during their military Service in a civilian work environment. SBMC's particular aim is to support those ex-Service personnel who have been unemployed or are living with a disability or health condition.



I have often heard it said that “Veterans don’t want a hand out, but a hand up” and this is exactly what SBMC offers, by giving veterans the chance to earn a living while developing their skills, building their confidence and helping them to maintain their independence. I am keen to see this type of Social Enterprise model replicated in different parts of Scotland, and in particular I would like to see this sort of support more readily available to Early Service Leavers and young veterans, giving them a hand up into the civilian world of work.

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2020-2021⁶³ states that:

“Veterans, members of the Armed Forces and their families are valued assets to our communities and society. We are fully committed to ensuring there is no disadvantage to the Armed Forces and veterans community in Scotland when accessing public services and support.”

Within the 2020-2021 programme there are no less than 221 references to community and communities. This shows I think, the value the Scottish Government places on such matters and I am keen to see veterans benefiting from this renewed sense of localism and optimism in developing our communities. One particular example of how the Scottish Government hopes to use the lessons learned from the immediate response to the Coronavirus pandemic, is through the Social Renewal Advisory Board⁶⁴. Although not aimed specifically at the veterans' community, their recommendations to the Scottish Government may well be the way to renew and revitalise our communities in the post-pandemic world. I would like to think that veterans can be at the heart of such initiatives, bringing their own specific talents and attributes to bear for the benefit of the civilian communities they are now living in.

61. Scotland's Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-2026

62. <https://scotlandsbravest.org.uk/>

63. [file:///C:/Users/u416483/Downloads/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/u416483/Downloads/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland%20(3).pdf)

64. <https://www.gov.scot/groups/social-renewal-advisory-board/>

The importance of the 3rd Sector

I cannot praise highly enough the massive contribution military and non-military charities make to the lives of veterans and their families in Scotland. These range from large charities operating nationwide to smaller local endeavours. Throughout the pandemic and despite real financial challenges, they have stepped up their assistance and provided vital aid to those in need.

In 2016 an overview and analysis report from FiMT and the Directory for Social Change Sector *Insight: Armed Forces Charities in Scotland*⁶⁵ looked at Armed Forces charities registered in Scotland (including cross-border charities), how they are categorised and the provision they make for beneficiaries. It was hoped that the report “would be a valuable catalyst to encourage further partnership working, collaboration and effective communication.”

I am convinced that collaboration between military and non-military charities and statutory services is now more vital than ever. This does not always have to be formal large-scale collaboration such as the well-respected Unforgotten Forces Consortium, which continues its great work amongst older veterans under the co-ordination of Age Scotland, but can be much more localised and ‘low tech’. I recently heard how Fares4Free⁶⁶ – who, prior to the pandemic provided free taxi services to veterans going to hospital or other appointments – swiftly repurposed themselves to provide a first response delivering groceries, prescriptions, household goods and providing a friendly ear to vulnerable veterans and their families. This was done through setting up a WhatsApp Group, which allowed individuals and other charities seeking support to quickly contact those able to provide that support. A simple but effective example of collaboration and communication in action at grass roots level.

In my ‘Positive Futures’ paper I said that “...collaboration can be a really cost effective way to achieve greater impact and reach a wider audience and by doing so, remove some of the confusion from the landscape. Perhaps organisations should be encouraged to rationalise the support they offer around ‘core missions’ or purposes, such as: information sharing; delivery of general welfare support and services; and the provision of particular support services...”

I firmly believe that by working together charities can not only help safeguard their own futures in these challenging times, but ensure that the essential and highly valued support, advice and assistance they provide continues to be available to those who need it. That will include those seeking support into work or advice on re-skilling or up-skilling. Charities are also employers, both of veterans and others. In order to protect their own employees, collaboration, a refocusing of support and avoiding duplication of services may also be required.



⁶⁵. <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/armed-forces-charities-in-scotland.pdf>

⁶⁶. <https://www.fares4free.org/>

Conclusion

A better understanding of veterans is needed if Scotland is to become the 'destination of choice' for many of the men and women leaving the Armed Forces today. Social Enterprises, the Scottish Business community, Armed Forces and Veterans Champions and the 3rd Sector can all contribute towards this improved awareness.

While veterans are more than likely to receive a warm welcome from their local communities, they should not simply expect 'civvy street' to open its doors to them without there being some reciprocal effort on their part to re-integrate into civilian society. By doing so, veterans and their families can become real assets to their local communities in many different ways. As a country, we spend a great deal of money, time and effort turning civilians into soldiers, sailors and airmen, but we also need to consider how best to then turn them back into successful civilians.

Recommendations

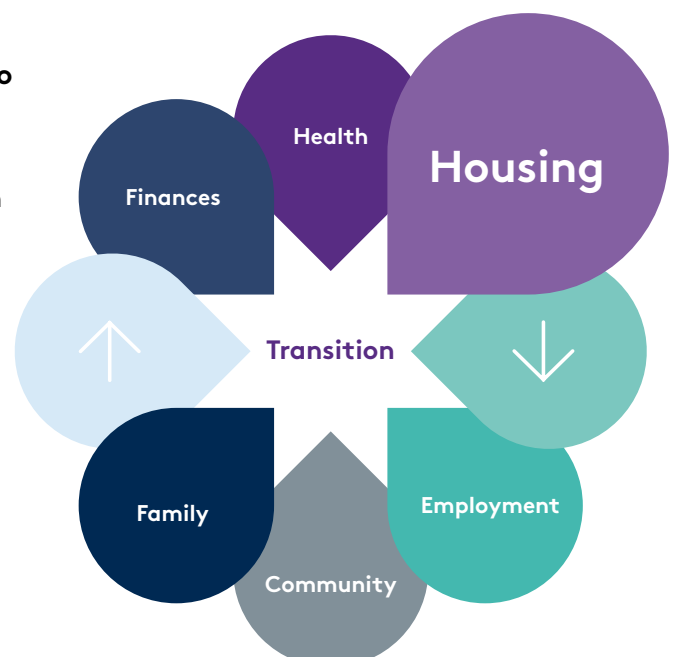
- In this time of social renewal, **Social Enterprises should be considered as a model** to support community development, provide services, facilities and employment for veterans – to ensure they do not experience any disadvantage due to their military Service.
- **Greater collaboration is needed across veterans' charities and associated charities** operating in Scotland and with central and local government to avoid duplication of effort and focus resources on areas of greatest need at this unprecedented time.

Next Steps

Throughout this report I have tried to challenge the current thinking, including unhelpful stereotypes about our veterans and what it means to serve, and promote veterans and their partners, and the skills, talents and experience they can bring. When I began writing this report I could never have foreseen how the situation we are currently living through would colour my thinking and recommendations. However, I am certain my original message in my introductory Positive Futures report is more important now than ever.

A smooth transition to a rewarding and fulfilling civilian life is what we want to see for all Service personnel and their families, and getting it right is important not just for the individual, but for our labour market, the future of our Armed Forces, and to Scottish society at large.

My next report in the Positive Futures series on Transition will focus on Housing and Making a Home in Civilian Society.





Positive Futures

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