

Forces in Mind Trust - Policy Statement on Employment

Purpose

1. This Statement sets out FiMT's policy position on the employment of ex-Service personnel and their families. It provides an overview of the evidence that exists to support it, the issues that inform it, and the changes that are needed to achieve it.

Background

2. Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was established in 2011 by a £35 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund. Our vision is for all ex-Service personnel and their families to lead fulfilled civilian lives. Our mission is to enable successful sustainable transition. We deliver our mission by commissioning and funding evidence generation to influence policy makers and service providers, and by improving the capability of the Armed Forces charities sector.

3. Gaining civilian employment is generally considered to be one of the indicators of a successful transition from military to civilian life¹. In adopting a programmatic approach to our work, based on our theory of change, our Employment Programme brings together a coherent set of projects with the aim of delivering tangible impact². It is supported and informed by our policy position on the employment of ex-Service personnel.

Policy issue

4. The transition from employment in the Armed Forces to civilian employment is one which most Service leavers make successfully. For a significant proportion though, it can be a challenge and issues associated with skills transferability and translation, employers' attitudes and personal identity can present barriers to securing sustainable and fulfilling employment. Transition also impacts on the employment and careers of spouses and partners, particularly if there is a relocation involved. The result is that employers are missing out on valuable skills and experience, and individuals are experiencing a loss of sense of purpose, with the knock-on effects on health and wellbeing, relationships and personal finances, all at considerable cost to society³.

Policy position

5. We believe that no ex-Service person, or their spouse or partner, should be disadvantaged in achieving successful employment outcomes, and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured and the bereaved. Our vision is for all Service leavers seeking employment to be able to secure a satisfying job role which meets realistic expectations, provides fulfilment, and generates a sufficient source of income.

6. At present some Service leavers are experiencing disadvantage when they seek to enter employment in the civilian world. This disadvantage, caused by time (often many years) spent

¹ Wrexham Glyndwr University: Leaving the Armed Forces and living as a Civilian, 2018

² FiMT's 2018 Impact Report provides further information on our Change Model and is available here: www.fim-trust.org

³ Kantar Futures: Continue to work. The Transition Mapping Study 2017, 2017

separated from the civilian world of work, is manifest in a failure to secure appropriate employment on transition. Working with others, we are using our evidence and knowledge base to ensure that such disadvantage ceases to exist. There is evidence to show that this will benefit Service leavers and their families, employers and the economy⁴.

Overview of evidence and issues

7. We have commissioned and published research on employment needs, barriers and outcomes, and we support an ongoing programme of research on the employment of ex-Service personnel. This provides knowledge and insight into the issues that face ex-Service personnel in entering and remaining in civilian employment.

8. **Factors affecting employability.** A range of factors affects employability and impacts on the likelihood of Service leavers achieving successful employment. Some relate to employees (the supply side), and some to employers (the demand side). Our research evidence shows that the following factors impact on employment outcomes:

- **The transition process.** There are inevitable tensions in the transition process arising from the need to continue to meet the demands of Service life and at the same time find space for preparation and planning for post-Service life. These tensions may be exacerbated if the Service leaver is:
 - Deployed on operations away from their home base for a significant period in the last 2 years before discharge.
 - Confronted with a number of myths and mixed messages about civilian life from both within and without the Armed Forces⁵.
- **Transferability of qualifications and roles.** Military qualifications are not recognized in the civilian labour market, even when they are for skills that are transferable and in demand⁶. Employers tend to underestimate the skill-sets of ex-Service personnel⁷. This can become a barrier, especially when combined with low levels of non-military qualifications.
- **Level of educational qualifications.** Veterans are less likely than non-veterans to be educated to degree level (19.4% versus 28.3%). Low literacy and numeracy rates are also an issue, most especially for Service leavers from the Army.
- **Employment.** Spouses' and partners' ability to secure employment impacts on the chances of a successful transition for ex-Service personnel⁸. However, spouses and partners who have experienced frequent relocations are not in a position to invest in their education and career⁹.

⁴ UK Commission for Employment and Skills: Employer Skills Survey 2015: UK Results (Amended May 2018)

⁵ Kantar Futures: Continue to work. The Transition Mapping Study 2017, 2017

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Business in the Community, Capitalising on military talent, FIMT, 2016

⁸ Centre for Social Justice: Military families and transition, FIMT, 2016

⁹ Ibid

- **Employment readiness.** Those Service leavers who left service early are at risk not only of struggling to find employment, but also of being less employment-ready as a consequence of being more likely to have housing, mental health, caring and substance misuse issues¹⁰.

9. **Profile of Service leavers who encounter barriers.** Evidence shows high levels of employment among veterans overall¹¹. However, some Service leavers are more likely than others to encounter barriers to employment. These include:

- Service leavers from UK Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- Female Service leavers¹²
- Non-UK Service leavers who encounter barriers in obtaining the legal right to work in the UK¹³
- Service leavers who have been medically discharged
- Early Service leavers (who have served four years or less, or those who have served more than four years but been compulsorily discharged): the employment rate for ESLs is relatively low with only 52% reported to be in education, training or employment six months after leaving¹⁴

In addition, those who served in the British Army are significantly more likely than those who served in the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force to be unemployed six months after leaving the UK Armed Forces.

10. **Quality and nature of employment.** The statistics on levels of employment do not present a full picture. Recent research has shown that while most ex-Service personnel maintain employment over time, many of the challenges that ex-Service personnel face on initial transition continue in the long-term such as using their knowledge, skills and experience, overcoming employer perceptions, and acclimatising to a civilian workplace.¹⁵ Research conducted by the Royal British Legion has also shown that an estimated 60,000 members of the ex-Service community reported having to take a job for which they felt overqualified or underpaid¹⁶.

Addressing the issues – where are we now?

11. We know that significant structural and cultural barriers still exist between employers and the transitioning Armed Forces community in terms of access to job opportunities, identification of

¹⁰ Anglia Ruskin University: Future Horizons Programme Final Report,

¹¹ Deloitte, the Officers' Association and Forces in Mind Trust: Veterans work: moving on, 2018

¹² Ibid

¹³ Pearson C, Caddick N: Meeting the Needs of Commonwealth Personnel and Families: A Map of Service Provision, FiMT Research Centre, Cobseo, Army Families Federation, 2018

¹⁴ Pike, A, Deployment to Employment, The Royal British Legion, 2016

¹⁵ QinetiQ, Longer-term employment outcomes of ex-Service personnel, 2021

¹⁶ Royal British Legion: Deployment to employment: exploring veteran unemployment in the UK, 2016

talent and the bringing together of employees with skills and experience that match the needs of employers.

12. We recognise and welcome the range of positive developments in place that are helping to break down barriers. Government's continuing support and programmes of funding for the Armed Forces Covenant; the work of Defence Relationship Management on behalf of the Ministry of Defence to help employers better understand the value of signing the Covenant; and the support provided by the Career Transition Partnership are all helping. The Defence Transition Services, established in 2019, is also likely to improve the outcomes for those Service leavers identified as being at enhanced risk of unsuccessful initial transition.

13. Government's support for overcoming barriers is brought together in the Government's cross-departmental 'Strategy for our Veterans' published in 2018¹⁷ as well as the subsequent Veterans' Strategy Action Plan developed by the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA). We strongly support the principles that underpin the vision set out in this strategy, and the objective of encouraging and enabling veterans to maximise their potential as civilians. The publication of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy in 2019 has also helped to ensure that the MOD takes a more holistic approach to supporting successful transition to civilian life. We will continue to work with the OVA and MOD to ensure that implementation of these policies are informed by evidence-based research on what works best; we believe this is one of the key ingredients needed to further break down barriers to employment.

14. Employers' engagement with and commitment to the Covenant and the Employers' Recognition Scheme are increasing¹⁸, and some mostly large private sector employers have been leading the way through taking initiatives such as specific recruitment drives and adjustments to HR practices.

15. Progress is being made in the small business and self-employment sector. For example, in 2018 the Federation of Small Businesses appointed its first Armed Forces Champion, and the work of X-Forces Enterprise is having real impact by supporting people from the Armed Forces community into entrepreneurship and business start-ups.

16. In the public sector the Step into Health programme is offering a route into employment and career development opportunities for members of the Armed Forces Community, recognizing the transferable skills and values that Service personnel can bring to the NHS. Our view is that the 'Step into...' model is one which could be replicated in other parts of the public sector.

17. The positive change that is already underway is not enough to negate the need for support for those Service leavers who encounter barriers. The voluntary sector plays a critical role in addressing that need. Analysis of voluntary sector trends shows that there are 59 Armed Forces

¹⁷ HM Government: The Strategy for our Veterans, 2018

¹⁸ Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018 reports that the total number of employers of all types and sizes across the UK has risen to over 3,000, HM Government, 2018

charities providing employment support. 61% of the support provided by those charities is in the form of advice, and 39 of the charities providing support offer recruitment related services¹⁹.

Addressing the issues – what needs to happen?

18. While there is much that is positive which should be celebrated and shared widely, we know that there is still a long way to go. There are some specific changes and actions that are needed to overcome existing barriers. These include actions that we believe are achievable and can be delivered in the relatively near future, as well as more fundamental changes in attitudes that may take longer:

- **Including work placements in the resettlement process.** Service leavers would benefit from being better prepared to enter the civilian employment market. The recent positive changes that have been made to the process could be built on by enabling access to work placements through providing opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships or a period of contract work. The benefits of doing so have been highlighted in research we commissioned from the University of Warwick²⁰ and from Deloitte²¹.
- **Skills translation and accreditation.** There is a need for Government to strengthen its strategy for translating and accrediting skills, experience and qualifications gained in the Forces for the civilian world. This will help to increase awareness and understanding among civilian employers of how Service leavers' skills fit their recruitment needs.
- **Better recognition of transferable skills and competencies.** While some employers actively seek to employ Service leavers, many lack awareness and understanding of the skill-sets and transferable skills and competencies they can bring, such as efficiency and the ability to work under pressure²². The Armed Forces Covenant has helped to raise awareness of transition issues and encourage fair treatment, including by employers²³. However, evidence shows that negative stereotypes continue to be widespread, persistent and damaging to employment prospects²⁴.
- **The benefits system.** Research evidence shows that for those ex-Service personnel who encounter difficulties in making a successful transition into civilian employment, the benefits system is difficult to navigate, and there are instances of benefits sanctions being inappropriately applied to veterans²⁵. Better identification of veterans and understanding of

¹⁹ Directory of Social Change: Focus on: Armed Forces Charities – Sector Trends, 2019

²⁰ Warwick Institute for Employment Research: Self-employment and the Armed Forces Community, FiMT, 2018

²¹ Deloitte: Veterans Work: Moving On, FiMT, 2018

²² Kantar Futures: Continue to work. The Transition Mapping Study 2017, 2017

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Futures 4 Forces: UK employers' perceptions on the employment and employability of ex-Service personnel, 2015

²⁵ University of Salford: Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers. FiMT, 2019

their complex needs are required. We are encouraged by the Department for Work and Pensions willingness to engage on this issue, and the introduction of an ‘Armed Forces marker’ for Universal Credit claimants, but it will take time and a concerted effort by the Department to ensure that the necessary changes take place.

- **Attitudinal change and increased awareness and understanding.** In 2018 research showed that 39% of employers believe veterans are likely to be institutionalized, and 30% thought that serving in the Armed Forces ‘damages people’²⁶. There is a clear need to address these negative perceptions and to increase awareness and understanding of the benefits that veterans bring to the workplace. We published a research report on how to improve the delivery of organisational pledges made under the Armed Forces Covenant. This showed that there are many organisations across the public, private and voluntary sector who wish to support the Armed Forces Community, but who lack the knowledge and understanding of how to do so; our report shows how employers can support ex-Service personnel and benefit from their skills and experience²⁷.
- **Better data on employment outcomes.** Government statistics are published for those Service leavers who have used the services of Career Transition Partnership (CTP). These show that levels of employment among Service leavers are relatively high six months after leaving the Armed Forces (87% of Service leavers compared to the current UK employment rate of 75%)²⁸. However, they do not show the quality or longevity of that employment. Better data would improve knowledge of long-term career paths. While recognising the challenges involved, we need better data on those who do not use CTP or whose employment outcomes are unknown (42% in 2021/2022), and to better understand the outcomes for the Service leavers who have used CTP but are not in employment. CTP and MOD are working to address this, and we look forward to seeing fuller data becoming available, in order to ensure that employment support can be targeted towards those who have a need, but are not currently accessing it.

Measuring success

19. Changing policy and practice through evidence generation and influencing inevitably takes time, and requires changes in awareness, attitudes and understanding. The measures of success are therefore complex and comprise a mix of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ indicators. We will continue to commission research and analysis to provide evidence and insight into the progress made and challenges encountered in improving employment outcomes for ex-Service personnel. We will encourage other organisations to build success measures into their employment related initiatives. We will work closely with Government to help ensure that the current data is strengthened so that

²⁶ You Gov: Public perceptions of veterans and the armed forces. FiMT, 2018

²⁷ NatCen, Shared Intelligence, Benefit not Burden. FiMT, 2019

²⁸ MOD: Career Transition Partnership Annual statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment (published 16 February 2023)

the profile of those people experiencing barriers to employment, or who have poor employment outcomes, is clearer.

20. We recognise that we will not be able to quantify absolutely the extent to which FiMT has contributed to positive change; our role is to influence and catalyze others, using an evidence-based approach to do so.

Reflections and next steps

21. If we are to create a society in which no Service leaver, or their spouse or partner, experiences disadvantage as a result of serving in the Armed Forces, we need to build on the positive changes that are already happening. Sharing success and telling the story of the skills and strengths that make ex-Service personnel a genuine asset to employers are key. The journey to embed lasting change will inevitably take time.

22. Our role at FiMT is to generate evidence that sheds light on the issues, and to use our convening power to bring together organisations and individuals to stimulate debate, engagement and action that leads to changes in policy, practice and attitudes. Our strategy is to enhance the readiness of ex-Service personnel for civilian employment and in parallel improve understanding of employers so that barriers are removed. In this way we are committed to ensuring that those who have served in the Armed Forces achieve successful employment outcomes when they transition from Service to civilian life.

Sources of Further Information

- All of the employment related research that we have funded can be found on our website: <https://www.fim-trust.org/reports/>
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