

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



UNDERSTANDING SERVICE LEAVERS AGED 50+ THEIR CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES IN THE CIVILIAN JOBS MARKET

A study for the Officers' Association
with funding from the Forces in Mind Trust

Professor Matt Flynn and Dr Chris Ball
Centre for Research into the Older Workforce
April 2020



CONTENTS

UNDERSTANDING SERVICE LEAVERS AGED 50+

THEIR CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES IN THE CIVILIAN JOBS MARKET

Forewords	4
Glossary of terms	
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	9
INTRODUCTION	25
LITERATURE REVIEW	29
SECONDARY ANALYSIS	43
METHODOLOGY	55
FINDINGS	67
WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT	81
CONCLUSION	145
Appendices	149
Appendix 1: MODREC letter of support	150
Appendix 2: Statement of informed consent	151
Appendix 3: Interview protocol, Former Service people	153
Appendix 4: Interview protocol, Current Service	155
Appendix 5: Focus group protocol: Employers	157
Appendix 6: References	159

FOREWORDS

Lee Holloway
CEO, Officers' Association

We work with officer job seekers of all ages providing specialist employment advice as they transition from military to civilian employment. Some make this move easily and require minimum support. For others however, this journey can be more challenging, with further support needed over a longer period of time.

One age group consistently stands out as experiencing increased difficulties in transitioning – those aged 50 years and over. While there is a growing body of evidence testifying to the barriers facing all veterans seeking employment, none has examined the particular hurdles faced by this age group.

Our Armed Forces is a young workforce by both necessity and design and, to ensure a continuous flow of new talent through the ranks, most of our senior personnel have to leave by the age of 55. Finding yourself searching for your first civilian position after a lifetime of military service is never going to be easy. Nor does it make economic or social sense to have highly skilled military personnel economically inactive. Older workers are crucial to the future of the UK economy, and of course we all benefit from their tax revenues if they're in work.

We were delighted that FiMT, like the OA, recognised the need to undertake this study and decided to fund the research and the Centre for Older Workers (CROW) were equally responsive. All of us aim to provide a belated voice for over 50+ Service leavers looking to build a rewarding second career.



Our findings are complex. Whilst over a third of 50+ Service leavers reported experiencing ageism, anti-military bias or both, there are growing numbers of employers recognising the value of military experience and skills to their business. Employment is high in the UK and just over half of 50+ Service leavers are securing civilian work before leaving the military. Yet, dig deeper and we discover that 1 in 5 are working in non-permanent positions such as casual employment, some because they are unable to find sustainable long-term employment.

More can be done to align the needs of older veterans available and wanting to work for longer with the quality and diversity of the work on offer. This report lays bare our recommendations and argues for further cohesive thinking and actions between our Armed Forces, MOD and employers, but mostly, it adds to the momentum gathering pace, of continuing to support this country's veterans into employment, long after they have supported us.

Ray Lock
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

In eight years at Forces in Mind Trust, I've found that it's rarely helpful to apply my own experiences of transition from military to civilian life to the types of study we commission. And the challenges facing a departing 52-year old air marshal (other Services are available) who joined 34 years earlier surely can't apply to everyone?

Well it turns out, rather satisfyingly, that most of them can. This report resonates with me personally in part thanks to my experiences in 2012, but also because it returns to some key themes and recommendations that span every piece we've ever written on the subject of transition in my time at Forces in Mind Trust.

Leavers should take individual responsibility, plan well ahead, translate qualifications and make them transferable, get to know the civilian environment (workplace and recruiting) whilst in service, help civilian employers understand the qualities ex-Service personnel bring and overcome mis-perceptions and prejudice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, if you mix the negatives of 50+ job hunting with ex-military disadvantage, you end up with another 'double whammy', a phrase we first applied to describe the challenges faced by female Service leavers. And there are similarities.

Spare a thought then for the 50+ female Service leaver from an ethnic minority.

But to think that those leaving the Services are alone would be a mistake. Our sister Trust 'The Centre for Ageing Better' reports that over 800,000 people in



the UK aged between 50 and 65 want to be working but are not, and that getting them into the right employment could contribute £18 billion worth of GDP. Fixing this would benefit everyone.

We commissioned this work to answer the simple question – where are Service leavers aged 50+ suffering disadvantage, and how can this be overcome? And at the end of every report we commission, we expect a call to action, something that readers can rally behind, and that we as a Trust can take to policy makers and others to fix.

In our policy statement on employment, which I commend, we call for better recognition by employers of the skills and expertise that Service leavers bring, and an attitudinal shift in the understanding of employers (and wider society) of the benefits that ex-Service personnel and their families bring. This report makes it abundantly clear that these are the correct policy goals, and that they apply to the 50+ workforce in even greater measure. Ambitious goals perhaps, but the right ones.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

50+ Service leaver: The term used in this study to designate someone who is in the process of, or has already left, the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50. Where we refer to people who are currently transitioning out of (leaving) the Armed Forces, we designate them as such. People who have completely left the Armed Forces (and who are either in civilian work, unemployed or retired), are referred to as former Service people.

Armed Forces: The Royal Navy (RN), Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) of the United Kingdom, sometimes referred to as 'the Services'. Although functionally similar to the Army, the Royal Marines are part of the Royal Navy, not a separate Service. The Army is the biggest service in terms of numbers, having more personnel than the RN and RAF combined.

Armed Forces Covenant: The Covenant is a pledge made by businesses, government, charities and communities to support current and former members of the Armed Forces in areas including housing, education, healthcare, financial assistance, and employment.

Career Transition Partnership (CTP): The Ministry of Defence's (MOD's) official Armed Forces resettlement programme, delivered under contract by an external commercial provider (Right Management). CTP provides resettlement support, career transition advice, and training opportunities for leavers from any rank or service.

Career Transition Partnership Annual Statistics (CTPAS): Statistical bulletins produced by CTP on employment outcomes of Service leavers six months after leaving the Armed Forces.

Commissioned Officer: An officer appointed by Queen's commission. This is what is normally understood by the term 'officer' in the Armed Forces (e.g. in the Army, commissioned officers are Second Lieutenant and above).

Employer Recognition Scheme: A scheme run by the Ministry of Defence to support employers to support Service leavers and their family members. The scheme recognises good practice carried out by employers through bronze, silver and gold awards.

Enlisted Ranks: A term sometimes used for servicemen or servicewomen who joined the Armed Forces at entry-level (e.g. as a private in the Army) with the prospect of subsequent promotion through the ranks.

Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS): Time-limited appointments to fill posts that need a serviceman or servicewoman (i.e. cannot be civilianised), but generally do not have a liability for operational deployments. FTRS posts can be filled by an ex-regular or a reservist.

Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO): A serviceman or servicewoman holding a more junior position of authority (or rank) in the Armed Force through promotion by merit through the enlisted ranks.

Officers' Association (OA): A charity whose charitable object is to promote the welfare of former commissioned officers.

Other Rank (OR): The term used by the Ministry of Defence to designate all Service people other than commissioned officers.

Petty Officer: A senior NCO in the Royal Navy (equivalent to Sergeant or above in the Army or RAF).

Regular: A full-time member of the Armed Forces.

Reservist: A part-time member of the Armed Forces. Reservists may previously have been a regular but most have not. In most cases, they will also have a civilian job in parallel with their reserve service. Reservists are generally excluded from this study as a result (although see FTRS).

RFEA: The charity whose mission is to promote employment opportunities for all Service people (focusing on non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and junior enlisted Service people).

Senior Rank: A generic term for Service people who are ranked between and including Sergeant and Warrant Officer (in the Royal Navy, they are known as Senior Rates). (By contrast, Junior Rates / Ranks are Leading Hands / Corporals and below; they are excluded from the study as very few if any 50+ Service people are junior ranks.)

UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS): A survey carried out by the Ministry of Defence to gauge attitudes and perspectives of Service people to major programmes and policies affecting their careers in the Armed Forces.

Veteran: A former (normally regular) member of the Armed Forces. Throughout the report, we use the term Service leaver rather than veteran.

Warrant Officer: The ranks immediately below commissioned officer, and above NCOs. Appointed by Queen's warrant.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to identify the unique challenges faced by 50+ Service leavers and ways in which employers can support them into work. It presents findings from a project conducted on behalf of the Officers' Association by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW).



The project was funded by Forces in Mind Trust. The project explored the experiences of Service leavers of all ranks transitioning out of the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50 (referred to henceforth as 50+ Service leavers) and searching for work in the civilian job market.

Discussions were held with 50+ Service leavers (both currently transitioning and those who had completed the process) and employers. Through a series of interviews and workshops, the project investigated 50+ Service leavers' experiences of and attitudes towards transition. In addition, it revealed examples of good practices being undertaken by employers and the perspectives of managers who engaged with 50+ Service leavers in civilian employment.

BACKGROUND

The Armed Forces have a predominantly younger workforce. Nearly all Service people join between seventeen and twenty-four years of age.

The demanding nature of Service life (with frequent operational and training deployments and anti-social working hours and conditions) means that most choose to leave after eight to twelve years of service (MOD, 2018b). Net outflow before the age of 35 has recently been 122%¹ (MOD, 2015).

The intensely physical nature of most junior officers' and non-commissioned officers' roles and the need for a steady flow of new talent up through the rank structure means that there are relatively few opportunities for continued employment beyond the mid-thirties, especially in more junior roles.

¹ Figures are over 100% because from 2012-2016, the Armed Forces was implementing a redundancy programme (Dempsey, 2019) Therefore, during this period, more under-thirty year old were leaving the Armed Forces than joining

The Armed Forces' employment structures are designed accordingly, with initial contracts of engagement being for a maximum of twelve years and only those assessed with leadership potential in commissioned roles or with particular skills being offered an extended contract of up to twenty-four years.

There is nonetheless a need to retain mid-ranking officers, as well as some warrant officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) beyond the twenty-four year point (i.e. beyond their mid-forties) where their experience will be particularly valuable and the role cannot be civilianised. Some of this group of individuals, as well as commissioned officers, could well serve beyond the age of fifty.

However, the same imperative of ensuring a steady flow of new talent up through the rank structure means that almost all need to leave by fifty-five in order to create opportunities for those coming up behind them, and even the most senior officers will leave by the age of sixty, for the same reason.

This explains why the Armed Forces have a steady outflow of older service leavers at an age where, in civilian life, most of the wider working population could expect ten or more years of continued employment, and would be unlikely to be considering a change of career.

PURPOSE

There were two contextual questions for this research: first, whether 50+ Service leavers experience the process of finding suitable work as more challenging than their younger equivalents, and second, whether 50+ Service leavers experience job seeking as more difficult than older workers generally.

The answers to both questions are complex. On the one hand, skills which have been acquired through military service are generally valued by employers. Further, the support which is provided by the Armed Forces to facilitate a smooth transition to civilian work is greater than most employers would provide older employees who are seeking a new career.

**ALMOST ALL
[SERVICE LEAVERS]
NEED TO LEAVE
BY FIFTY-FIVE IN
ORDER TO CREATE
OPPORTUNITIES FOR
THOSE COMING UP
BEHIND THEM**

Comparing the experiences of 50+ Service leavers with other groups of workers (for example, those who leave the military at a younger age or civilian older workers) can provide insight into the challenges which they face in making a late career job transition. Accordingly, we use CROW's previous work on the older workforce as well as MOD data on Armed Forces personnel to provide a context. However, to understand the unique experience of 50+ Service leavers in seeking valuable and stable work, it is important to talk with them directly and examine what they say on their own terms- not just relative to other groups of more frequently studied workers. Therefore, the core of this research project involved workshops and surveys of 50+ Service leavers themselves (both those who were in the process of transitioning and those who already had done so) as well as employers who are seeking their skills, knowledge and experience.

KEY FINDINGS

The research project had five objectives.

1 To understand the perception of 50+ Service leavers regarding the barriers and challenges to mid-career transitions

- **Experiences of 50+ Service leavers in the civilian labour market is varied, but a significant minority struggle to find work which they value and makes good use of their skills and abilities.**

While 40% of older former Service people said that finding their first job after transitioning out of the military was easy, a third said it was difficult. A majority said that they had found a civilian job before completely leaving the Armed Forces, but 13% said that they had been unable to find work six months after their transitions. 50+ Service leavers are not alone in struggling to make mid-career job transitions. Entering a new profession can be especially difficult given that employers generally prioritise experience gained in the industry over that achieved outside of it. 50+ Service people often find it challenging to demonstrate that their military acquired skills can be valuable to civilian employers.

- **50+ Service leavers report widespread experiences of discrimination.**
30% of people who have left the Armed Forces at this age have experienced ageism when looking for civilian work and 28% say that they have experienced anti-military bias. Sometimes, these prejudices were experienced directly while at other times people reported a sense of being treated unfavourably. Although workplace

age discrimination is unlawful, employers continue to hold and act on assumptions about older workers' capabilities, performance and expectations in work.

A recent survey by CROW of workers aged 50-65 showed that only two-thirds of older workers feel that their employers treat everyone the same regardless of age (Davies, Van der Heijden, & Flynn, 2017). Experiences with ageism can be made worse when combined with other forms of discrimination. In fact, 23% of 50+ Service leavers reported experiences of both ageism and anti-military bias.

- **50+ Service leavers are generally encouraged to maintain personal development plans (PDPs) throughout their military service.** However, pressures in work can often make finding time to career plan difficult. These pressures can be especially felt by Service people who are stationed overseas and who have struggled to access career-building resources.
- **Many 50+ Service leavers say they feel a sense of loss on leaving the Armed Forces.** Two in five older former Service leavers say they have thought about returning to military service at least occasionally since transitioning to civilian life.

33%

found
securing their
first civilian
job difficult



1 in 5 are working in
non-permanent positions
such as self-employment,
portfolio work or casual
employment

30%

experienced
ageism
and



28% experienced
anti-military bias



41%

had applied for work
below their skill levels

53%



secured civilian work
before leaving the Armed
Forces

85%

find their civilian jobs
interesting

59%

are happy with
their salaries

34% state leadership
as their most
important skill



but only **10%**
of employers rate
this for new hires

49%

of employers
agreed that
50+ Service leavers
have skills their business
can benefit from



1 in 4 employers
do not consider Service
experience relevant
to their industries

2

To understand employers' perception and motivations regarding recruiting 50+ Service leavers and the benefits and challenges they bring to their organisations and gaps between their perceptions and those of 50+ Service leavers

- **There is a significant mismatch between the skills which 50+ Service leavers have to offer and what employers say they need.**

What older Service leavers have to offer employers is not always what employers say they want. The skill which older Service leavers say they have which is most important is leadership, but only 10% of employers say that leadership skills are what they are looking for. The two skills which employers say they are in most need of are technical skills and industry-based experience, but only 15% and 13% respectively of 50+ Service leavers say that these are the most valuable skills they have to offer.

- **Employers generally recognise and value the skills which 50+ Service leavers have to offer.**

They say that employers can make good use of military skills, that 50+ Service leavers have a good range of experience and that they are dedicated and loyal. However, many employers struggle to match the skills of older Service leavers with the needs of their organisation and one in four say that they would be dissuaded from employing older former Service people who lack experience in their industries.

- **Perceptions which employers have of 50+ Service leavers often do not match reality.**

For example, many employers think of older Service people as being regimented and unadaptable, but Service leavers themselves say that military service requires them to be resilient within the context of uncertainty and change. While there is a widespread perception that older Service leavers have career and salary expectations which are unrealistically high, Service leavers themselves report a range of aspirations for their post-military careers.

- **Some employers recognise the difficulties which older Service leavers have in applying for work.** Examples of supportive practices include insight days, guaranteed job interviews to Service people, job placements, and the allocation of Service mentors.

3

To understand how 50+ Service leavers experience transition out of the Armed Forces and into civilian work

- **Reaching the military pension age was the most common reason for 50+ Service leavers deciding to transition out of the Armed Forces.** More of them reported being ‘pushed’ out of military Service by, for example, being told they would have to leave (28%) than being ‘pulled’ by opportunities in the civilian world such as ‘wanting to try something new’ (22%).
- **Family context shapes decision-making of 50+ Service leavers in terms of the timing of transitions out of the Armed Forces.** Some said that they transitioned out of military service due to pressure from a partner. For others, decisions were influenced by family responsibilities, such as having a young family or needing to care for an elderly relative.
- **While most 50+ Service leavers find work before or soon after leaving the Armed Forces, a minority experience long term unemployment, under-employment or precarious work.** Being unable to secure stable work can have an impact on the Service leaver’s mental health and sense of identity, as well as financial well-being. Service leavers who had been out of work for an extended period reported feeling hopeless about ever being able to find work.
- **50+ Service leavers said that their main priorities when looking for work were to find a role which is interesting (75%), made good use of their skills (67%) and made them feel valued (52%).** Some said that when they had left the Armed Forces, they were unsure of the kind of civilian work they wanted and thought that career counselling could help to focus their job search strategies. To add context, a survey by CROW showed that half of older workers more generally say interesting work is their number one priority (Davies et al., 2017), although many say they look for work which will enable them to reduce work pressure (McNair, Flynn, Owen, Humphreys, & Woodfield, 2004).



ONE IN FIVE 50+ FORMER
SERVICE PEOPLE IS IN
NON-PERMANENT WORK

4

To identify strategies which 50+ Service leavers take in finding and securing work which they value and the support which they need in doing so

- **50+ Service leavers with long military service can struggle in navigating a civilian jobs market which they have not participated in for decades, if at all.** 21% rated their CV writing skills as poor, while 44% said they lacked confidence in negotiating their pay and conditions of service.
- **Social networks were cited by most 50+ Service leavers as crucial in the job search process.** When applying for a job, knowing another Service leaver in the prospective workplace was thought to be particularly important. However, not everyone felt confident in their networking skills with one in four saying their networks outside the military were poor.
- **Some 50+ Service leavers reported making efforts to hide their age and/or past military service when looking for work.** For example, some Service leavers reported taking up training and job placement opportunities in order to develop their civilian job experience and de-emphasise their military service.
- **Some 50+ Service leavers said they struggled to understand the customs and practices of the job searching process** and thought that they could benefit from help in taking part in an interview, requesting feedback, handling rejections and making best use of social media.



5

To gain insights about 50+ Service leavers' careers once they have made their transition out of the Armed Forces, and understand what they consider to be a successful transition

- **50+ Service leavers generally said they were happy with the work which they had found in the civilian world.** 85% described their work as interesting; 59% were happy with their salaries; and 72% said their work made good use of their skills. However, a significant minority say they feel unhappy with their jobs with 40% saying that their work fails to make them feel valued; 35% said they were not working in a supportive work environment; and 25% reported that their work made it difficult to meet families' needs.
- **One in five 50+ former Service people is in non-permanent work such as self-employment, portfolio work or casual employment.** Some reported choosing non-permanent employment as a way to exploit rare and sought after skills they possessed or to be their own boss, while others said they were unable to find permanent work.
- **Many Service leavers reported having made multiple job transitions since leaving the Armed Forces.** Some older former Service people noted that they had tried many jobs in the civilian world before settling into work which they felt matched their skills and aspirations. It was emphasised that mid-career Service leavers should avoid planning for their first civilian job to be their last one.
- **On average 50+ Service leavers said they planned to retire at the age of 63.** However, there was a wide variety of retirement plans and one in four had no plans to retire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the research allowed a number of recommendations to be made to help overcome the barriers and challenges Service leavers face. Some of the recommendations focus on the Service leavers themselves while others concern organisations which support Service leavers into civilian work. A second publication from this research offers recommendations to employers on making the best use of 50+ Service leavers' skills, experience and capabilities.

Recommendations are organised according to the support which 50+ Service people can benefit from before, during and after their transition out of the Armed Forces.

**A THIRD OF EX-SERVICE
PEOPLE SAID THAT
THEIR TRANSITION INTO
CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT
WAS DIFFICULT**



1

Civilian career planning before leaving the Armed Forces

A need to ensure consistent maintenance of personal development plans (PDP):

In his review of military transition processes, Lord Ashcroft (2014) recommended that Service people be instructed to maintain PDPs which chronicle the skills they have acquired through military service that can later be used in finding civilian work. While most Service leavers reported being encouraged by their commanding officers to maintain PDPs, many also said that they struggled to do so, especially when they are on demanding assignments. Military assignments which provide the most valuable skills can often cost Service people the time they need to maintain their PDPs. Ensuring that PDPs are current and well-documented is particularly important for people who leave the Armed Forces after 50. However, some whom we spoke to said that there were gaps in their PDPs, especially while they were in high pressured roles.

A need for career planning for 50+ Service

leavers: Service leavers were generally (though not exclusively) positive about the support which they received from the Armed Forces and the Career Transition Partnership (CTP)¹ in terms of developing and enhancing their employability skills such as CV writing or capacity to take part in a job interview. However, some 50+ Service leavers are unsure about what they want in terms of a civilian career and uncertain about what kinds of occupations would suit their skills. Some Service leavers have said that they would like more help in planning their civilian careers. While CTP could lead a programme of career planning, employers could make an important contribution by providing opportunities for Service leavers to experience work in different sectors through job placements, apprenticeships and short-term engagements.

Supporting reservists: Many 50+ Service leavers decide to join the Reserves upon transitioning out of Regular service. Being a reservist can help 50+ Service leavers to maintain access to military support like training which can help reservists progress in their civilian careers as well as maintain their connections with the military community. Encouraging 50+ Service leavers to consider becoming reservists also benefits the Armed Forces which can retain their skills and knowledge, acquired through long service.

² CTP is the MOD's official provider of Armed Forces resettlement.

2

Smoothing the transition to civilian work

A need for flexibility with the last appointment in the Forces: Some Service leavers reported missing out on civilian work secured early in their transition because employers could not wait for them to complete their military service. This can create anxiety across the two-year transition process. Early in the transition, they doubt their ability to find a job which will be open once they complete their service, while towards the end of the transition, Service leavers worry about being able to find work before they become unemployed. Employers have a role in helping to bridge the transition process and many are happy to work with Service leavers in fixing their starting dates of new employment. However, Service leavers say that greater flexibility during their last assignment could also smooth the transition process. One option might be to offer transitioning Service leavers phased arrangements, in which they gradually reduce military service while stepping into a new role in the civilian workforce.

Redeploying transitioning 50+ Service people to mentoring roles: Service leavers who are in phased transitions could mentor colleagues or help their successors transition into the role. Phased retirement models have been developed in the UK and throughout Europe which both enable older workers some flexibility with how and when they retire and provide organisational benefits like knowledge retention and supporting younger workers in setting into new roles. Employers like BAE Systems and BT have developed systems to enable older workers and their managers to negotiate work arrangements for their final years of work. (Flynn, 2014) While 50+ Service leavers are usually transitioning from one career to another, the MOD can draw good practice from other organisations' approaches to managing exit processes.

Supporting 50+ Service leavers in planning their first job interviews: Many 50+ Service leavers spend the first year of their transitions researching their civilian career options, as well as training and networking, and their second year sending out job applications and interviewing. However, there are no rigid rules about the best time to start applying for

jobs. Some 50+ Service leavers may need longer to apply for jobs, especially if they lack experience in the civilian job market and delaying the time at which they start to apply for jobs can carry risks. For this reason, it is important that both the Armed Forces and civilian employers are as flexible as they can be in terms of leave and start dates in order to support 50+ Service leavers in making successful transitions into sustainable civilian employment.

A need for negotiating skills: Employers frequently say that 50+ Service leavers need to manage their expectations when seeking work, but often from the Service leaver's perspective, it is the employers' expectations which are unclear. Service leavers say that many employers have assumptions about their career expectations, ability to fit into the team, and dedication to stay in the job in the long term. Some reported that prospective employers expected them to work on a reduced salary because if they were continuing to draw a military pension. Differences in expectations between Service leavers and prospective employers could be addressed through honest and open discussions, either before or at an early stage in their employment, but Service leavers said they lacked the skills to undertake these. CTP could offer training on negotiating salaries and work conditions. Organisations like trade unions and professional bodies already offer such support and might be persuaded to extend such training to Service leavers. An initiative to raise the awareness of Service leavers' needs with employee organisations could perhaps be taken.

Fostering networks of Service leavers: Many 50+ Service leavers said that they had secured employment with the help of other Service leavers who acted as mentors, advisors, advocates and a sympathetic ear. Several organisations facilitate networks between Service leavers including the Officers' Association and RFEA as well as local authorities (We visited a Veterans' Hub in Hull for example.) and employers. Such network building is indispensable for 50+ Service leavers as they try to get a foot in the door of industries in which they would like to work.



**EMPLOYERS GENERALLY
HAD POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS
OF SERVICE LEAVERS,
ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH
LONG MILITARY SERVICE**


3 Advocating for 50+ Service leavers

Challenging ageism and anti-military bias:

Experiences of discrimination are common amongst 50+ Service leavers with 42% of them saying that they experienced ageism, anti-military bias or both when seeking employment. A few examples of direct discrimination (like offensive name-calling) were reported, but more often employers held assumptions about 50+ Service leavers, such as them being 'too regimented,' which did not match reality. Employers could extend the provisions of existing diversity and inclusion policies and practices, to combat bias against 50+ Service leavers. Employer associations, Service charities and the MOD itself could lead the way by promoting good practice in challenging discrimination faced by this group.

Reaching small and medium-sized enterprises

(SMEs): Some of the employers who took part in the focus groups were signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). Signing the AFC and applying to be a member of the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) were seen as valuable for participating organisations in helping them to recruit talented people, making the best use of military skills, and demonstrating their commitment to meet corporate social responsibilities. However, it was also recognised that businesses which are facing the greatest skills shortages are also the least aware of the capabilities of 50+ Service leavers. While not every organisation has the Human Resource Management (HRM) capacity to join the AFC, the principles of being a Forces Friendly Employer could be applied within organisations of all sizes. An outreach campaign to SMEs could connect 50+ Service leavers with organisations which are in most need of their skills and experience.



**SERVICE LEAVERS WHO
HAVE BEEN UNEMPLOYED
FOR A LONG TIME SAY THAT
THEY FEEL ISOLATED AND
SOMETIMES ABANDONED**

4

Supporting self-employed, precarious workers, and the unemployed

A need for support for self-employed and portfolio workers: While many 50+ Service leavers want secure and full-time employment, others are hoping to set out on their own through self-employment or portfolio work². They may choose such work arrangements because they feel that they have marketable skills in high demand, want autonomy over when they work and what kinds of jobs they take on, or simply because they value the feeling of being their own bosses. They may also choose self-employment or portfolio working because they have struggled to find permanent work. People who are interested in these work arrangements say that they would like more support in organising and managing their own businesses. They say that they would benefit from training in financial management, marketing, finding clients and using their networks to find work.

A need to support unemployed and under-employed Service leavers: While most 50+ Service leavers said that they had found work soon after or even before leaving military service, some struggled to find work. The longer the period of

their unemployment, the more anxious they felt. Service leavers who have been unemployed for a long time say that they feel isolated and sometimes abandoned by the Armed Forces, military community and employers. Bespoke support for long term unemployed 50+ Service leavers, offering them career planning, work placements and a job mentor could help them make a successful transition.

A recent review carried out by the charity Shaw Trust noted that employers in sectors facing chronic skills shortages are developing work programmes to match the skills which older unemployed have with the skills with which employers face a shortage (Shaw Trust and TAEN, 2014). A works programme could include work placements which enable the job seeker to demonstrate how their skills could be remobilised. Such programmes could also include retraining which for many employers would be a modest investment which could pay dividends in terms of bringing in new skills in occupations which they have struggled to fill. CTP should consider working with AFC signatory employers to develop and pilot programmes to support 50+ Service leavers who have been unemployed for over six months to transition into sustainable work.

² A portfolio worker works on a number of different projects often for different clients.



5

Supporting 50+ Service leavers across the life course

Supporting Service leavers in subsequent transitions: For many, if not most 50+ Service leavers, the job change which they make when leaving the Armed Forces is not their last one. It often takes Service leavers a long time and several transitions before they find work which suits them, and many may opt for job transitions as circumstances change in terms of family, finances and personal ambitions. Some may also be forced into a job change through redundancy or health problem. Former Service people with whom we spoke offered future Service leavers the advice that their first civilian job is unlikely to be their last. While some Service leavers say that each job change gives them the chance to improve their employability skills, others report difficulties in making job changes, especially as they approach retirement age.

The MOD provides comprehensive support to people transitioning out of the Armed Forces, but Service leavers experiencing job change between civilian jobs said that the support which they received was limited and variable. Allowing Armed Forces people to access career services (such as those provided by CTP during transition) throughout their civilian careers, could be an effective way of ensuring successful transitions. It would reinforce the principle that people who have given long service to their country are supported throughout their lives. It would also help employers tap into the skills and experience which Service leavers have to offer. Given the long-standing commitment of the OA and RFEA in supporting Service people, responsibility for providing career support across the life course could be shared between the MOD, CTP and these membership organisations.

METHODS AND SAMPLES

The core of the research was carried out through discussions with three groups of people:

- Service leavers who had transitioned out of the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50³
- Service leavers who at the time of the research were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces and would be completing their transitioning at or after the age of 50⁴
- Managers who work in civilian organisations and who had responsibilities for recruiting staff.⁵

Service leavers who participated were from all military ranks - the project embraced the experiences of 50+ Service leavers who were both officers and senior ranks⁶ in the civilian job market.

Throughout the project, the perspectives of the three groups were compared and contrasted. For example, the expectations of people who were currently transitioning out of the Armed Forces about their job prospects in the civilian job market were compared with the job search experiences of people who have completed the transition process. Further, perceptions held by managers of 50+ Service people's capabilities, expectations, and work ethics were compared with the reality as expressed by Service leavers themselves.

-
- 3 Ex-Service people included those who were employed in civilian work, reservists, self-employed, portfolio workers and unemployed. It excluded those who were retired.
- 4 Because the Armed Forces transition process is two years, current Service people we spoke to could be as young as 48 years old.
- 5 Managers included not only human resource managers, but also anyone who has responsibility for setting recruitment policies for the organisation or recruiting staff within their teams (e.g. line managers). Managers were recruited both from employers which are proactive in the employment of Service leavers (e.g. have signed the Armed Forces Covenant) and those which are not.
- 6 Senior ranks is defined as Service people who are ranked between and including Sergeant and Warrant Officer (in the Royal Navy, they are known as Senior Rates). Junior Ranks are Leading Hands or Corporals and below, although they are excluded from the study given that very few 50+ Service people are junior ranks.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

Focus groups were conducted with present and future Service leavers and managers. Eleven focus group discussions were held with 50+ Service leavers (both current and former) in England and Scotland. With current Service people, researchers discussed their reasons for leaving the Armed Forces; their preparation for job searching outside of the military; and career plans after transition. Former Service people discussed their experiences in the job market and their careers after transition. One-on-one interviews with 50+ Service were conducted to complement focus group discussions. In total, thirty-six former Service people (twenty-five former officers and eleven former senior ranks) and twenty-two current Service people (sixteen officers and five senior ranks) were interviewed. Twenty-seven managers were interviewed in six focus groups and one on one interviews. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences with and perceptions of 50+ Service leavers.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

An online questionnaire survey was conducted of 50+ Service leavers (both current and former Service people). A twenty-seven question questionnaire to explore the same career and employability issues which were considered in the focus groups was designed and piloted. 183 former Service people and thirty-five Service people who were currently transitioning then took part in the survey. Additionally, using a Survey Monkey Panel and a database provided by the Officers' Association, a survey was conducted of employers. A twenty-four question questionnaire was designed and piloted to measure their experiences and perceptions of 50+ Service leavers. 328 managers took part in the employer survey.

In addition to the focus groups and surveys, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Officers' Association, and Service charities.

The Officers' Association

Mountbarrow House, 6-20 Elizabeth Street,
London SW1W 9RB

Tel: 020 7808 4160

www.officersassociation.org.uk

