



## Ensuring successful employment transitions for veteran Senior Non-Commissioned Officers

### What's the problem?

Evidence shows that veteran Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) 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. This is despite SNCOs having a wealth of transferable skills which should be highly valued by many employers.

This study was commissioned to identify the key barriers and challenges to SNCOs making a successful employment transition and to provide recommendations on how they can be best supported.

Findings showed that although almost 80% of SNCO veterans were currently working (either employed or self-employed, full-time or part-time), many were not in the jobs they expected or wanted. More RAF veteran SNCOs were in employment than those in the other Services, while unemployment levels were highest for Navy veteran SNCOs. Those with higher educational qualifications were more likely to be in work than those with lower or no qualifications (full-time employment also declined in line with lower qualifications). A total of 14% of all SNCOs (22% of Navy SNCOs) had planned to undertake further training upon leaving, but less than 1% were currently in full-time training or study.

SNCOs faced a number of challenges from pre-transition through to post-transition:

- Reluctance to leave the Services.
- Lack of time to engage with resettlement.
- Dissatisfaction with the resettlement support offer.
- Lack of realistic advice given to those about to leave.
- Available jobs not matching current salary.
- SNCOs' skills and experience under-valued or misunderstood by potential employers.
- Difference in work culture and work ethic, different management styles and a perceived lack of commitment by civilians.
- Loss of identity and status.

## What's a successful transition?

A successful transition is defined by veteran SNCOs as: being happy and content with their situation; having enough money; enjoying work; and having a good work-life balance. SNCOs, the MOD, military charities and employers need to work together to ensure and support a successful transition.

## What can veteran SNCOs do?

- **Take advantage of opportunities to upskill and reskill while still in the Services.** SNCOs' experience and military-related skills are often under-valued in the civilian labour market, partly because their skillset is misunderstood and not easily transferable. The unique skills of SNCOs, combined with their age, may be a disadvantage when competing with civilians for jobs. SNCOs need to ensure they have developed transferable skills or gained nationally-recognisable qualifications while in the Services to make them more attractive to potential employers.
- **The pre-transition phase should include self-directed planning and research.** SNCOs are often under-prepared for life after the Services. There is a need to explore and learn about local labour market opportunities and recognise where suitable jobs are located, as well as using intermediate jobs as 'stepping stones' if necessary. In some situations, veteran SNCOs may need to be prepared to either commute or move to where suitable jobs are available, especially when they have particular skillsets which are not easily transferable to the civilian labour market.
- **Prioritise resettlement.** SNCOs often engage with resettlement too late for a variety of reasons. As a result, some choose resettlement courses which are ill-suited to the jobs they are likely to get in civilian life or choose not to attend courses which may be useful. Many have unrealistic expectations of the kinds of jobs and salaries they will get after leaving. They need to prioritise their resettlement over their jobs, engaging fully with the process by attending potentially relevant courses and workshops and identifying the likely jobs available to them after leaving.
- **Accept the change and be ready to move on.** Many SNCOs are reluctant to leave but have no options to remain. SNCOs need to accept the move and take advantage of skills such as adaptability and resilience, developed during their time in the military.
- **Engage fully with any mental health support offered before and after leaving.** SNCOs are less likely than other veterans to ask for help and support. Isolation from friends and colleagues and loss of status upon leaving can be traumatic, especially to those who have little or no experience as an adult in the civilian world. SNCOs need to engage with what is on offer pre-transition, need to avoid negative behaviours (e.g. alcohol and drug abuse) and engage with other military charities if and when needed.
- **Explore ways to expand networks (both informal and formal) beyond the military.** Many SNCOs have no previous experience of non-military employment or job-searching and the prospect of civilian life can be daunting. Due to their time in the Services, their status and the close-knit nature of military life, SNCOs often have fewer networks to draw on in the civilian world compared with other cohorts, such as Officers or those who have served for a shorter period of time. They need to look beyond the Services, well in advance of leaving, to expand their formal and informal networks.

## The role of the MOD

- **Help SNCOs to detach themselves emotionally from the military and accept that they are leaving.** The proportion of veteran SNCOs suffering from mental health issues after leaving the Services is concerning, with 12.5% of SNCOs saying that mental health issues were extremely or very challenging when trying to seek employment. The MOD should consider the provision of compulsory mental health and practical advice workshops (or drop-in sessions) before leaving, as well as access to refresher courses after 2 years if an SNCO is unemployed and/or in need of additional support.
- **Ensure that SNCOs are provided with adequate time to complete resettlement courses and actively encourage them to do so.** Many SNCOs said they had no time for resettlement because of the nature of their jobs. To ensure that SNCOs are fully prepared for the civilian labour market, the MOD should prioritise resettlement, ensure that SNCOs have time to complete courses and also support and allow their move into a 'transition' role 2 years before leaving.
- **Consider providing bespoke sessions for particular groups of SNCOs.** The most senior SNCOs found difficulties in networking, interview techniques and adapting behaviours. Female veteran SNCOs and Navy veteran SNCOs also appear to find particular difficulties in translating their skills and experience into civilian employment. The MOD should consider bespoke offerings to particular groups reporting difficulties, including talks by potential employers and ex-SNCOs from a similar background who have already had experience of civilian life.
- **Better manage the expectations of SNCOs.** Many veteran SNCOs reported that they were ill-prepared for civilian employment and their aspirations did not match the reality of what was available to them in the civilian labour market, the qualifications and skills required, as well as likely salaries. This needs to be spelled out clearly pre-transition, perhaps by ex-SNCOs who can also act as mentors.
- **Throughout the military career of an SNCO, provide advice and encourage upskilling and retraining.** SNCOs with fewer qualifications have poorer labour market outcomes after leaving the Services. The findings also show that levels of training after leaving are low among SNCOs. The MOD needs to ensure that its workforce is up-to-date, but is also ready for the civilian labour market after leaving.
- **Ensure that resettlement support is provided at the local level, where possible.** Some SNCOs commented that they did their resettlement courses in areas different to where they were going to settle and that the advice provided was therefore misaligned and irrelevant. Where possible, resettlement needs to be provided at the local level, providing realistic and up-to-date information on what jobs are available.
- **Consider the delivery of support over the longer-term.** Many veteran SNCOs face problems and challenges long after leaving, due to their particular difficulties in reintegrating into civilian life. Longer-term support could include a mixed-mode method (including online modules, advice and labour market information) to ensure accessibility and availability to all beyond the current 2 years of support.
- **Support all military spouses/partners to find and maintain work, and treat transition at the family level.** A working spouse or partner can provide financial support for those SNCOs who wish to retrain or upskill after leaving the Services to provide better employment opportunities, especially as they also have a financial buffer from their

pension. However, those veteran SNCOs with a degree or equivalent are most likely to have a working spouse, who is also most likely to be in full-time work, whereas those with lower qualifications are most likely to have a non-working spouse.

## How can charities help?

- **Charities, the MOD and employers need to work together.** Many SNCOs join the military at a very young age and have not had to take responsibility for mortgages, tax returns, finding a GP and schools for children, etc. Many commented that when they left the Services, they found it overwhelming to have to take responsibility for so many different things at once, including the pressure to find a job. Support on different topics (e.g. finances, healthcare) could be provided on a staggered, more manageable basis, and overall support could be provided on a longer-term basis, with a combined effort from the MOD, military charities and employers.
- **Charities need to be able to identify the most vulnerable SNCO veterans and maintain links with them.** GDPR restrictions may prevent charities from maintaining links with the most vulnerable veterans and SNCOs as a group are also the group least likely to seek out help due to the expectation that they are tough and resilient. Charities need to be able to support those most in need of help to avoid them falling through the cracks, perhaps by establishing a buddy system so support is available over a longer period.

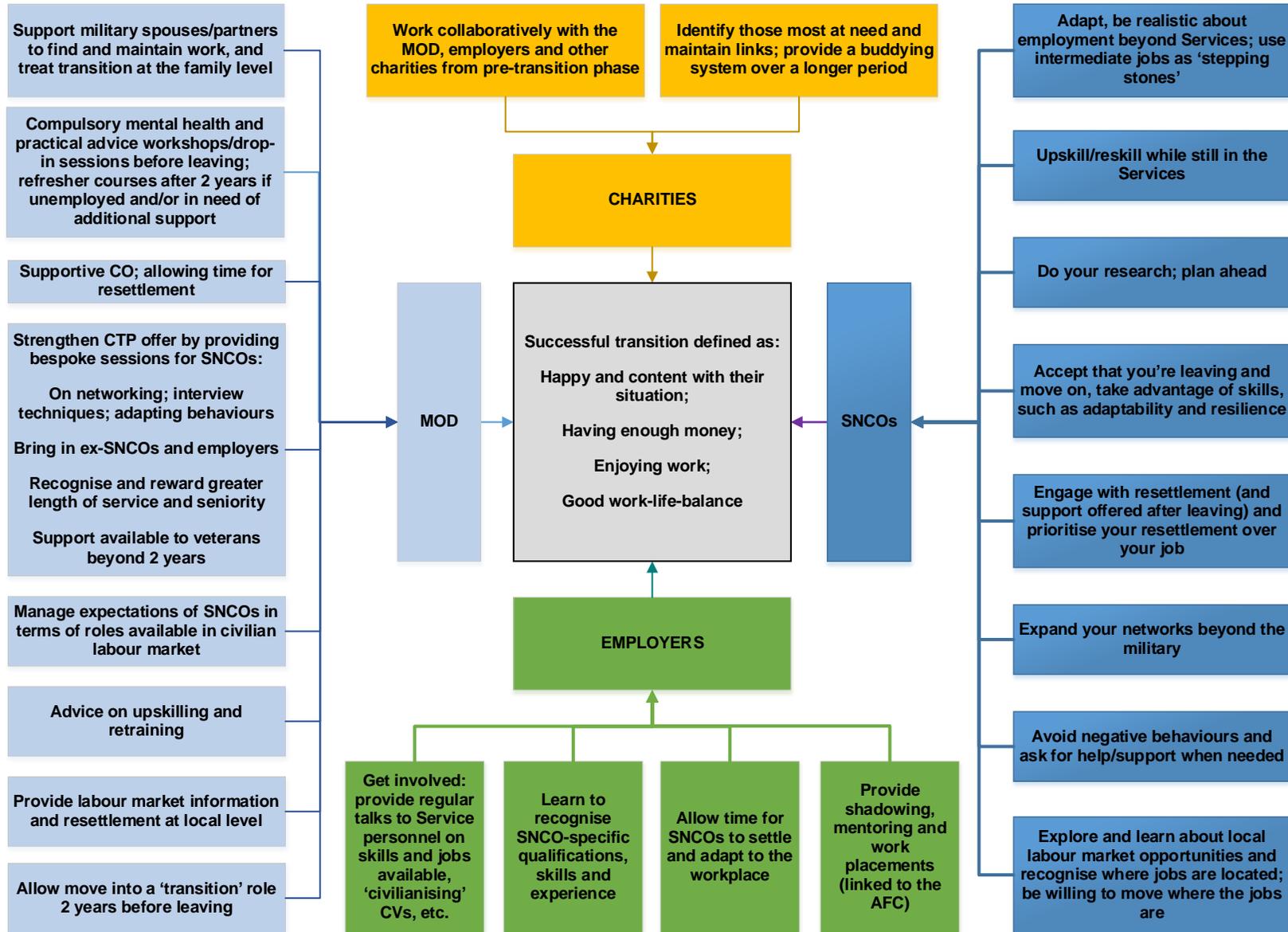
## Is there something that employers can do?

- **Get involved at all stages of an SNCO's transition from the military to civilian life.** SNCOs are keen to hear from employers about what kinds of skills are needed for particular jobs and also what civilian employment is really like. Employers could provide regular talks to Service personnel on skills and jobs available, help with 'civilianising' CVs, interview techniques, etc. Although Employment Fairs and Company Events are already available to SNCOs, wider advertising and advance notice is needed, as well as support from Commanding Officers, allowing SNCOs to book ahead, especially those with greater job responsibilities.
- **Learn to recognise SNCO-specific qualifications, skills and experience, and how these can be of benefit to an organisation.** SNCOs often commented on a lack of understanding by employers of their particular skillset and experience, and the difficulties they faced in explaining these in an interview, partly due to lack of practice. However, it is clear that they have a wealth of transferable skills which should be highly valued by many employers. Recognition and greater understanding could provide a 'win-win' to employers and veterans over the longer-term.
- **Recognise the difficulties and allow SNCOs to settle and adapt to the workplace.** Many SNCOs commented that they had to adjust their language, humour and management style to fit into civilian employment. This appeared to be especially difficult for those who had served for longer. Employers need to allow time for SNCOs to settle into a role and adapt accordingly.
- **Offer a range of opportunities as part of the Armed Forces Covenant award criteria.** The Armed Forces Covenant should ensure that employers offer as much support as possible, including workplace shadowing, mentoring and placements. Our

recommendation is that these opportunities are linked to the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards and are monitored regularly for compliance. For example, current Gold award holders need to proactively demonstrate forces-friendly recruitment and selection processes, engage with CTP, be registered on the Forces Families Jobs portal, be an exemplar in the sector for advocating support to Armed Forces members, and provide 10 days' leave for reservists, as well as maintaining the criteria for Bronze and Silver.

**To download the full report, go to: [www.fim-trust.org/reports](http://www.fim-trust.org/reports)**

# Ensuring successful employment transitions for veteran SNCOs



Recommendations for the report: 'Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Employment after leaving the UK Armed Forces'; to read the report, go to [www.fim-trust.org/reports](http://www.fim-trust.org/reports)

## Ensuring successful employment transitions for veteran SNCOs

Evidence shows that veteran Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) 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. This is despite SNCOs having a wealth of transferable skills which should be highly valued by many employers. A successful transition is defined by veteran SNCOs as: being happy and content with their situation; having enough money; enjoying work; and having a good work-life balance. SNCOs, the MOD, military charities and employers need to work together to ensure and support a successful transition. The following recommendations come from a study to identify the barriers and challenges to SNCOs in making a successful transition. For the full report, go to: [www.fim-trust.org.uk/reports](http://www.fim-trust.org.uk/reports)

### SNCOs

- Accept the change and be ready to move on
- Take advantage of any opportunities to upskill and reskill while still in the Services
- Take time for planning and research into local labour market opportunities; be prepared to commute or move to where the jobs are
- Prioritise resettlement
- Engage fully with any mental health support offered before and after leaving
- Explore ways to expand networks

### The MOD

- Help SNCOs detach themselves emotionally from the military; provide compulsory mental health and practical advice before leaving, and access to refresher courses
- Encourage upskilling and retraining throughout SNCO career
- Ensure that SNCOs have time to complete resettlement courses; encourage them to do so
- Allow SNCOs to move into a 'transition' role 2 years before leaving
- Consider providing bespoke sessions, particularly for the most senior SNCOs and those who struggle more, e.g. female and Navy veteran SNCOs
- Better manage the expectations of SNCOs
- Support military spouses/partners to find and maintain work; treat transition at the family level
- Consider providing longer-term support

### Charities

- Work with the MOD, employers and other charities to explore support during the pre-transition phase and beyond
- Consider staggered, manageable provision of support on different topics (e.g. finances, healthcare)
- Identify vulnerable individuals, maintain links with them and establish a buddy system

### Employers

- Get involved at all stages of an SNCO's transition from the military to civilian life (e.g. offer opportunities such as workplace shadowing, mentoring and work placements)
- Learn to recognise SNCO-specific qualifications, skills and experience, and how these can be of benefit to the organisation
- Recognise difficulties and support SNCOs to settle and adapt to the workplace

# Ensuring successful employment transitions for veteran SNCOs

Timeline of action to support transitions from the military, taken from the report: 'Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Employment after leaving the UK Armed Forces'; to read the report, go to [www.fim-trust.org/reports](http://www.fim-trust.org/reports)

Timeline	SNCO	MoD	Employers	Charities
- 4 yrs	Engage with education opportunities to gain skills and qualifications	Provide ongoing advice on upskilling and retraining		
	Consider where/how you live after leaving the Services, e.g. buying or renting a property	Forward planning role for resettlement (last posting should be relevant to civilian sector)	Collaborate with MOD and get involved at all stages of an SNCO's transition from military	Collaborate with the MOD, employers and other charities to explore how SNCOs can be supported during the pre-transition phase and beyond
- 2 yrs	Upskill and renew qualifications	Support military spouses find and maintain work and treat transition at family level	Potential employers engage with SNCOs help with 'civilianising' CVs, interview techniques, etc.	
	Search for jobs, training courses, etc. and research labour market	CO support and time for SNCO to do resettlement		
- 6 mths	Engage with resettlement offer			
	Build up informal and formal networks with veterans and employers	Enhance CTP offering and provide at local level, where possible, so relevant to SNCOs choice of location after leaving	Support CTP offering by talking to SNCO about employment opportunities	
		Provide compulsory workshop on leaving the military, finding work and mental health	Provide mentoring, work shadowing and placement opportunities	
0 yrs	Find a job before leaving	Provide opportunities for veteran SNCOs to talk with those leaving Services		
			Employers recruiting SNCOs should provide support and allow them to settle	Support those in most need of help and maintain links with them
	Identify useful courses, update CV and interview skills		Employers to recognise and understand skills and experience of SNCOs with support from MoD	Establish a buddy system so support is available over a longer period
2 yrs	Expand networks		Continue to provide mentoring, work shadowing and placement opportunities	
		Provide access to refresher courses for those who are unemployed and/or need additional support		
	Access ongoing courses and support	Provide regular support and check-in points (buddy system)		
	Seek help if required	Offer 'refresher' resettlement training for those post 2 years		
	Continue to develop and engage with opportunities			

