

## Strategic Defence Review

***‘Proposition 13. Propose measures in priority order that establish how UK Defence transitions to the optimum balance of regular, reserve, civil servant, and industry people across all standing tasks and commitments and on mobilisation. Recommend the recruitment, education, training and retention measures required to achieve this.’***

1. Our response offers insights on the People proposition as part of the Review but recognises that the wider issue of transition and resettlement is integral to the optimum balance across the whole force.

### **Forces in Mind Trust**

2. [Forces in Mind Trust](#) (FiMT) was founded in 2011 to improve transition to civilian life for Service leavers and their families. Our mission is to enable successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. We do this by funding evidence generation to understand issues and identify what works, convening stakeholders and decision makers and equipping them with the knowledge and understanding required to improve the experiences of Service leavers and families. Our response is therefore informed by the research we fund and the information gathered through convening stakeholders.

### **Priorities**

#### **Effective transition support**

3. Armed Forces personnel are central to Defence capability. As the recent Haythornthwaite report on UK Armed Forces incentivisation recognises, to attract and retain the personnel needed to keep the UK safe against current and future threats, it is imperative that the UK Armed Forces effectively develop, manage, and support its personnel in service, while ensuring provision keeps up with and reflects the contemporary and changing environment of wider society within which defence operates.

4. An integral component of serving well is leaving well, which requires the support of seamless and inclusive access to transition processes and resettlement support. This will increase wider Defence capability and enhance recruitment and retention. However, research has highlighted that those from potentially vulnerable cohorts, such as those who are unexpectedly discharged (e.g. medical discharge or administrative discharge due to compulsory drugs test failure), non-UK Service personnel and female personnel, can face significant challenges when transitioning.

5. Our *Lifting Our Sights*<sup>1</sup> report identified future trends that will impact on Defence’s ability to recruit and retain personnel. This includes a changing public perception of the UK Armed Forces, changing characteristics of conflict, and changing demographics and expectations in UK society. Therefore, in order for military service to remain a relevant and attractive proposition for a wider cohort of candidates, this will require an increased societal awareness of the role, value and necessity of Armed Forces service.

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<sup>1</sup> [Lifting Our Sights, Future Agenda, 2021](#)

6. In addition, a successfully transitioned former Service person and their family, who valued their time in service, provides several benefits to the concept of wider Defence. Not only in being a potential Reservist for future operational capability but in positively promoting the Armed Forces as an attractive employment prospect. Their ability to contribute positively to UK society aids recruitment and broadens and improves the public's understanding of the role of the Armed Forces.

7. Further evidence will be available in Autumn 2025 from our commissioned project that will examine the contemporary transition experiences for ex-Service personnel, examining the impact on transition of both changes in how the Armed Forces serve and are employed, as well as changes within wider society. This research will be an integral tool in making successful policy and planning decisions to shape the future of transition to ensure personnel serve and leave well.

### **Developed skill set**

8. Ensuring Service personnel have developed the skill set to both thrive in service, and be valuable members of civilian society when they leave, is crucial. This requires through-service personalised and inclusive education and training in areas that will support them in civilian life, including finance and housing matters, as well as broader coping skills and self-confidence. This will support personnel to develop effective life skills to help prevent poor outcomes and to take greater responsibility for their lives in the military and beyond. The importance of a strong skill set was highlighted in our recent research on Life Skills<sup>2</sup>.

### **Empowered systems**

9. To ensure former Service personnel and their families are supported in civilian society, there is also a requirement for effective post-service support, including veteran-aware civilian services, veteran-specific support when required, and a consistent application and understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant.

10. In order to create these systems, we recommend learning from, and building on, the evidence of what is already working well. This includes those local authorities who are effectively delivering the Covenant. FIMT's *Decade of the Covenant* report<sup>3</sup> provides an assessment of best practice that can be shared with others.

11. In addition, it is important to learn from the evidence of the challenges experienced by personnel whilst serving, which may impact on their decision to leave, as well as public perceptions of the experience of serving in the Armed Forces. This includes the experiences of specific cohorts such as female<sup>45</sup> and Non-UK<sup>6</sup> personnel, or where research shows more support is required for the cohorts who may be at risk of poorer outcomes after leaving the Armed Forces, such as early Service

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<sup>2</sup> [Improving Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces](#), QinetiQ, 2023

<sup>3</sup> [A Decade of the Covenant](#), Shared Intelligence, 2022

<sup>4</sup> [Female Service leavers and employment](#), Cranfield University, 2019

<sup>5</sup> SUSTAIN: Identifying and Examining the Barriers to Ex-Servicewomen Making a Successful and Sustainable Transition to Civilian Life in the UK, King's College London, ongoing research

<sup>6</sup> [Understanding and improving non-UK service and transition in the British Armed Forces](#), Anglia Ruskin University, 2024

leavers, female and ethnic minority veterans<sup>7</sup>. Ensuring that the experience of service is positive, and that transition processes are comprehensive, inclusive, readily available and accessible will make the Armed Forces a more attractive proposition for a wider range of cohorts.

### **Recognition of Armed Forces families**

12. Armed Forces families face significant challenges due to the nature of Service life, particularly the high level of mobility and separation. Supporting families is crucial as the impact of service on families is often a significant factor in personnel deciding to leave the Armed Forces. However, the impact on the family can be overlooked, with the family perceived as the ‘forgotten’ contribution to Defence<sup>8</sup>.

13. An increased recognition of the contribution families make to UK Defence, as well as a recognition that families are individuals in their own right, separate from the serving person and with their own needs considered separately, should be a future component of the Armed Forces ‘offer’ and thus key to recruitment, retention and transition measures.

14. Alongside this, there is a need for increased and direct engagement with families by the Services and MOD to ensure that they have access to support, as well as the need for an increased understanding within Defence of the disadvantages that families can experience<sup>9</sup>.

### **Priority action areas**

We recommend five priority action areas to ensure that the Armed Forces Community (serving personnel, veterans and their families) are effectively supported during and after service:

1. Empowering military and civilian organisations to better understand the ‘transition’ journey Service personnel go through to join, serve and leave the Armed Forces.
2. Personalising the transition process for Service leavers and their families, leading to earlier ‘pre-emptive’ support activity.
3. Equipping personnel with the skills and knowledge needed to empower them to lead successful lives throughout and after service.
4. Broadening and improving public understanding of the role of the Armed Forces and the transferrable skills of Service personnel.
5. Recognising the importance of families and mitigating the impact of Service on family members.

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<sup>7</sup> [Longer-term employment outcomes](#), QinetiQ, 2021

<sup>8</sup> [UK Veterans Family Study](#), Queen’s University Belfast, 2024

<sup>9</sup> [Financial Stability of military families](#), RAND Europe, 2023