

Get Britain Working – Reforming Jobcentres call for evidence

Response from Forces in Mind Trust

Introduction

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was founded in 2011 with a £35 million endowment from the National Lottery Community Fund to support ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. We do this by funding evidence generation to understand issues and identify what works, and by convening stakeholders and decision-makers to equip them with the knowledge and understanding required to improve the experiences of Service leavers and their families. We also fund the independent [FiMT Research Centre](#), a free to access research repository on ex-Service personnel and their families, delivered by King's College London and RAND Europe.

Most Service leavers and their families make a successful transition to civilian life, utilising the skills and experience gained in the Armed Forces. A minority struggle however, and this can include health issues and difficulties finding appropriate employment that matches their skills and qualifications. As a result, some will require additional support from civilian services such as JobCentre Plus and the NHS. It is therefore important that the needs of the Armed Forces community are fully understood and given appropriate consideration as the Government seeks to reform employment, health and skills support.

Our response is informed by the research we have funded, and we have included links to the specific reports. If you would like to discuss any part of our response, or would like to find out more about the research referenced, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at policy@fim-trust.org

1. The Purpose of JobCentre Plus

1b. Are there any groups that JCP should be supporting that it is not currently? If so, how should DWP engage with these groups?

Since 2017 FiMT has funded the Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers project¹, conducted by the University of Salford, to examine the experiences of ex-Service personnel as they navigate the benefits system. The first report published in 2019 showed that there was a requirement to better understand the needs of ex-Service personnel and since then the project team have worked with the DWP to better support the Armed Forces community including the introduction of an Armed Forces marker for Universal Credit recipients, enhanced training for JCP staff and greater provision of Armed Forces Champions. Whilst significant progress has been made, challenges remain. These include:

- JCP staff and Work Coaches not understanding the background of ex-Service personnel and the transferrable skills gained in the military which resulted in a lack of job opportunities that ex-Service personnel felt were appropriate for their skills set, with some being expected to take low-paid, insecure work that could leave them financially worse off. **The training programme developed for JCP staff should continue to be utilised to ensure that they have good understanding of the skills, background and experiences of ex-Service personnel.**
- Ex-Service personnel finding the benefits system complex and difficult to navigate. For many it was the first time they had interacted with the benefits system, and it was challenging to

¹ [Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers 2025, University of Salford](#)

understand how mainstream benefits interacted with Armed Forces compensation payments which led to errors and financial difficulties. **The DWP should work with ex-Service personnel, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Armed Forces charities to develop and deliver consistent guidance and raise awareness on how the compensation payments and benefits interact.**

- Inconsistencies in how ex-Service personnel experienced benefits assessments with misunderstandings common about the nature and purpose of assessments. **The DWP should work with assessment providers, Armed Forces charities and the NHS to develop and deliver consistent guidance on the purpose and processes involved, how decisions are determined and how benefits assessments differ from Armed Forces compensation assessments.**
- Healthcare professionals (HCP) undertaking benefits assessments lacking an understanding of ex-Service personnel and the physical and mental health issues related to their service. Whilst there is training provided, **medical education training on ex-Service personnel should be implemented as a routine part of training for all HCP.**
- Ex-Service personnel having to repeat or undergo multiple assessments which led to significant pressure and anxiety. **The DWP should work with the MOD to review the use of multiple assessments to determine how Armed Forces Compensation Scheme assessments could be used to help inform benefits assessments.**

1c. To what extent does JCP have an “image problem”? How might this be addressed?

Benefits sanctions can create feelings of injustice and mistrust as well as anxiety for some ex-Service personnel. However, this can be addressed by rebuilding trust through more positive and personalised interactions. **Ensuring that JCP staff and HCP are aware of the backgrounds, experience, skills and needs of ex-Service personnel will help to achieve this.**

The introduction and enhancement of DWP Armed Forces Champions has been positive with our research showing that the Champions provide personalised and crucial assistance, particularly for ex-Service personnel with complex needs. However, challenges remain with variations in geographical coverage and delivery of the role as well as demand and short-term funding causing capacity issues and uncertainty for both JCP staff and ex-Service personnel. **The DWP should review the Armed Forces Champion network to ensure that consistent support is provided in all JCP districts, review and identify the resources required to meet the need and permanently embed the Champions with sustainable funding.**

The JCP’s current image problem can also be addressed by creating a trauma-informed benefits system. For ex-Service personnel, they may have experienced trauma throughout their life, due to both service and non-service experiences. During the Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers project some ex-Service personnel felt that they were disrespected and disempowered by JCP staff and HCP which, in some cases, exacerbated existing mental health conditions. It is important that DWP services are trustworthy, collaborative and help to empower claimants. The research also highlighted examples of good practice which should be built upon. This includes:

- **Work Coaches and Armed Forces Champions understanding and respecting claimant's personal circumstances and experiences and tailoring support accordingly, appropriately**

using their discretionary powers to adjust interactions, expectations and communication methods and setting aside adequate time to support ex-Service personnel. We would welcome the Government's plan to assess the frequency and mode of mandatory face to face engagement.

- **Providing training to JCP staff and those working for outsourced private service providers on how traumatic experiences can affect individual functioning such as being overwhelmed or experiencing episodic mental ill health which can sometimes be misinterpreted as an unwillingness to engage with benefits and employment services.**

2. The experience in JobCentre Plus

2a. How effective is the support provided by Work Coaches, particularly to groups that experience disadvantages or particular challenges in the labour market?

The Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers project showed that Work Coaches play a key role in how ex-Service personnel experience the benefits system. It highlighted many examples of good practice by Work Coaches which align with the Government's aim to empower individuals to engage with employment support and try work without fear of losing their benefits. This included Work Coaches who demonstrated trust in the claimant that they were experts in their chosen career field and left them to pursue appropriate employment opportunities, rather than being pressured to accept any job.

The discretion afforded to Work Coaches played a significant role in whether ex-Service personnel perceived the support they received as helpful or punitive. Some ex-Service personnel were unsure about the expectations placed on them including the content of their claimant commitments. This was further complicated where Work Coaches changed and had differing expectations. Some ex-Service personnel also perceived their Work Coaches as formulaic and procedural with a lack of understanding of their Armed Forces background and the transferable skills gained during service. We would welcome an internal review of the claimant commitment to address its appropriateness for customers on work-related benefits. **Where conditionality is applied to ex-Service personnel, it should consistently consider their specific skills and qualifications and how they translate to the civilian labour market. Effective support should also be available to match military skills with appropriate civilian employment.**

Work Coaches often have significant caseloads and can face time constraints which impacts on their ability to provide a tailored approach to ex-Service personnel. The introduction of Armed Forces Champions, who can dedicate the time and flexibility required to provide appropriate support, has helped to ease some of the pressure on Work Coaches. However not all Work Coaches are aware that DWP Armed Forces Champions exist or of the support they provide. In line with the Government's aim of allowing more time and space for more personalised conversations, **it is suggested that, alongside the recommendation above of permanently embedding and funding Armed Forces Champions within the DWP, the DWP should raise awareness, both internally to Work Coaches and other JCP staff as well as externally to claimants, on the existence and role of Armed Forces Champions.**

3. Working with others

3a. How well does JCP connect with external partners? For example, schools, further education, employment support organisations and the third sector?

Achieving the Government's goal of improving the health of the population to enable more people to stay in and thrive at work, will require a joined-up approach with DWP and the Department of Health and Social Care, alongside local government. To improve the health of ex-Service personnel and ensure they gain suitable employment after service where appropriate, will also require collaboration with the MOD, the Armed Forces and military charities.

As highlighted in the Get Britain Working White Paper, the most prevalent primary health conditions for people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness are mental health and musculoskeletal conditions. In addition, cardiovascular disease and obesity, smoking, harmful alcohol consumption and physical inactivity are all key drivers of ill health. Whilst most ex-Service personnel report good health, several research studies, as well as Ministry of Defence statistics, indicate that ex-Service personnel may be at an increased risk of some of the conditions linked to economic inactivity. This includes higher rates of alcohol use in veterans compared to non-veterans and higher rates of PTSD for ex-Service personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan². Research conducted in Scotland³, as well as research conducted in the North of England⁴, suggests that ex-Service personnel are at an increased risk of hypertension, heart attacks and diabetes compared to those who have not served. To fully understand whether ex-Service personnel, and the wider Armed Forces community, are more at risk of developing certain health conditions that may impact on their ability to work, there needs **to be better identification of ex-Service personnel and their families within civilian health care. This can be facilitated by the continued roll out of Veteran-Friendly GPs⁵ as well as greater awareness of the needs of the Armed Forces community by health care professionals. There also needs to be greater effort on preventive interventions where ex-Service personnel are more at risk such as a continued focus on alcohol-use reduction as well as interventions to improve awareness of and help-seeking for mental ill-health.** We have funded several innovative studies to support the health needs of ex-Service personnel including the Drinks Ration app which has been shown to be successful helping ex-Service personnel to reduce their alcohol consumption⁶ and several treatment options to support ex-Service personnel with treatment-resistant PTSD⁷.

Previous research has also shown that some ex-Service personnel face greater challenges when leaving the Armed Forces making them more likely to experience unsuccessful employment outcomes. This includes women, ethnic minorities and those who are medically discharged⁸. Since 2020, the number of personnel being medically discharged has increased with musculoskeletal

² [Health and Wellbeing Study of Serving and ex-Serving Personnel: PHASE 4, 2024, King's Centre for Military Health Research](#)

³ [Trends in Scottish Veterans' Health, 2022, University of Glasgow](#)

⁴ A comparative study of mental and physical health disorders in the veterans and non-veterans populations, currently unpublished – expected to be available in early 2025.

⁵ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/case-study/veteran-friendly-accreditation-for-gp-practices/>

⁶ [Drinks:Ration, 2022, King's Centre for Military Health Research](#) App can be downloaded [here](#).

⁷ Including [MDMA- assisted therapy](#), [Enhanced Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation](#), [Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories](#)

⁸ Longer-term Employment Outcomes of Ex-Service Personnel, 2021, QinetiQ

conditions and mental and behavioural disorders the most common principal cause of medical discharge. It is therefore important that there is effective and appropriate support for those medically discharged to find work where possible and/or receive the benefits they are entitled to. **It is recommended that the DWP work with the MOD to ensure that Service leavers and organisations that support them know how to access their local DWP Armed Forces Champion. The DWP should also work with the MOD to ensure that Recovery Officers within the Armed Forces are offering personalised and realistic support in terms of employment opportunities after service.**

In 2022, FiMT funded a pilot⁹ to embed an employment consultant from the Poppy Factory, a charity which support ex-Service personnel with health conditions to find employment, into an NHS health centre at the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to support ex-Service personnel with physical and mental health conditions to find work. The pilot received positive feedback from both clinicians and the ex-Service personnel who took part. The success of the pilot was attributed to the service being viewed as a safe space in which a positive and trusting relationship developed between the ex-Service personnel and the employment consultant with the consultant understanding military experiences and skills as well as having a good knowledge of local employers and being able to remove barriers to employment through access to training and equipment. As a result of the pilot, **it is recommended that employment services are embedded within NHS healthcare trusts and there is a person-centred approach to employment support, with less pressure on first employment opportunities. In addition, employment consultants or advisors should have a good knowledge of the local labour market as well as an understanding of military experience, skills and culture.**

Aligning with the Government's aim to create a sustainable labour market through wider changes to the skills system in England, in 2023 we published a report on improving life skills in the UK Armed Forces community¹⁰. The research found that whilst most Service personnel and their families have good life skills, some required additional support to help them to develop the skills needed to deal with the demands and challenges of daily life when they leave the Armed Forces. This includes personnel who were lower in rank and younger in age and had not had the chance to develop their skills, or who had poor life skills when joining the military. Personnel and families highlighted applying for jobs, work-life balance, managing their own learning, networking and digital/IT skills as weaker skills. They indicated that they would like additional support to help develop these skills, as well as assistance with mental wellbeing and with the emotional adjustment to civilian life. **It is recommended that, through the current development of the MOD's Life Skills Programme, personnel most in need of life skills support are offered explicit instruction such as more practical or classroom-based approaches, beyond sign posting to help them to develop their life skills.** The report offers insights from existing life skills programmes outside of Defence that could be used to further improve the support available and offers potential opportunities for the DWP to work with the MOD and civilian organisations to deliver life skills support.

⁹ [Evaluation of The Poppy Factory's NHS-embedded Employment Support Pilot for Veterans, 2022, The University of Nottingham](#)

¹⁰ [Improving Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces, 2023, QinetiQ](#)

4. Careers services

4b. How can a new jobs and careers service support people to progress in their careers?

The majority of ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful transition into civilian employment. However, some struggle, and this can result in underemployment and businesses missing out on the skills and experience of ex-Service personnel and their partners. Several barriers can exist when trying to obtain successful employment after leaving the Armed Forces including:

- A lack of relevant qualifications and experiences and problems translating military skills.
- Being at a disadvantage due to a civilian hiring process not inclined to recognise Service personnel skills and some employers' perceptions of veterans.
- A lack of more coordinated support from the Armed Forces and employers to ease the transition into the civilian labour market.
- Discrimination by civilian employers due to age and military status.

In general, the Armed Forces equip personnel with a strong set of skills and there is a significant amount of employment support provided to personnel via the MOD Careers Transition Partnership¹¹. However, current support is not meeting the needs of all personnel and their families. **Further career support is therefore needed to help Service leavers to develop business skills such as commercial, marketing and financial skills. More tailored support is also needed to align with individual circumstances and needs, as well as the provision of more informed information on specific industries.**

To address the issues in translating and understanding military skills and experiences **the DWP, MOD and professional membership bodies should work together to produce a qualifications matrix to align civilian and military qualifications and support initiatives that engage civilian employers and build career pathways so that organisations can benefit from the talent offered by Service leavers that they may not currently know about or be able to reach.** Furthering the reach of the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme¹² and encouraging businesses to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant may help with this.

Armed Forces partners can also face barriers when seeking employment both during and after their partner's service due to frequent moves in service, the serving partner working long and unpredictable hours, qualifications not being recognised across the devolved nations, high childcare costs and separation from family members who could provide childcare support, and the reluctance of some employers to hire military partners^{13,14}. **It is recommended that there is more support for Armed Forces partners to find employment during and after service. This should include qualifications being recognised or transferred when moving between the devolved nations during service to ensure that skills are being utilised across the UK.**

¹¹ <https://www.modctp.co.uk/home>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-employer-recognition-scheme>

¹³ [You're in your own time now, 2023, University of Edinburgh](#)

¹⁴ [Examining the financial stability of UK military families, 2023, RAND Europe](#)

4c. To what extent will the new jobs and careers service anticipate future skills gaps, and take action to address those gaps before they are realised?

FiMT has funded a number of studies exploring future trends and their potential impact on both the Armed Forces community and wider civilian society¹⁵¹⁶. These include the changing nature of work and the workplace, changing skills supply and demand and demographic changes affecting the dynamics of the labour market. Trends such as technological innovation will reshape the skills that are in demand across different sectors, and it is expected that this will drive job growth in roles linked to technology, digitisation and sustainability with a growing increase for data and digital skills as well as high-skilled labour. Many Service leavers and their families will have the skills required and it is important that **connections between the Armed Forces, civilian career services and civilian employers are made to ensure organisations are able to tap into this talent pool and understand both the hard and soft skills that the Armed Forces community have.**

¹⁵ [Lifting Our Sights, 2021, Future Agenda](#)

¹⁶ [Navigating the external environment for military to civilian transition, 2025, RAND Europe](#)