

Appendices

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7.1 Glossary of terms

Service partners

Partners of serving personnel who are in long-term relationships and living with the service member. Service partners are often closely affected by transition and play a key role in family decision-making. Throughout this report, partners of serving personnel are referred to as service partners.

Service families

Families of serving or former members of the Armed Forces, including spouses or partners, dependent children, and other dependents, whose lives are directly affected by the military service, postings, deployments and transitioning to civilian life.

Transition

In this report, transition generally refers to the whole, holistic journey from joining the Armed Forces to establishing a civilian life. This definition was used in discussions with stakeholders and participants. However, participants sometimes used transition more narrowly to describe specific moments in the journey, such as from when serving personnel submit their notice to leave through to the years immediately following discharge.

The Armed Forces (UK)

The collective term for His Majesty's Armed Forces, comprising the Royal Navy (including Royal Marines), British Army, and Royal Air Force, is responsible for the defense of the United Kingdom, its Overseas Territories, and Crown Dependencies, as well as promoting UK interests, supporting peacekeeping, and providing humanitarian aid.

Family

Married or cohabiting couples and their children or dependents. In this report, the family does not refer to extended family members.

Behavioural interventions

Interventions based on strategies designed to influence people's actions and decisions, drawing on insights from behavioural science. These interventions aim to support desired behaviours such as engaging with transition support.

Mapping

A collaborative research and design method used to visualise experiences, interactions, or relationships within the journey or system. In this report, journey mapping and network mapping were used.

7.2 Phase 1 & 2 research questions and the methods

Phase	Research question	Method
1	What does a successful transition look like for families? How does the experience differ for different groups?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rapid evidence review of recent research on service leavers and their families including exploring the definition of a successful transition and the potential barriers/pain points in the journey.
1	What behaviours facilitate a successful transition? What specific moments in the journey are most important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rapid evidence review of recent research on service leavers and their families • A week-long online ethnography with service partners: including tasks, questions, and discussion boards to explore family life and transition experiences. • Behavioural journey mapping and analysis using the ISM model¹.
1	Who are the key stakeholders that service leavers interact with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A week-long online ethnography with service partners: including tasks, questions, and discussion boards to explore transition experiences and engagement with support. • Engaging with stakeholders from the Ministry of Defence, charities, and other organisations to map the transition journey, identify existing support, and explore reasons for underutilisation.
1	What support sources are working well for service families, and why? What could be improved? How do service families prefer to receive communications?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A week-long online ethnography with service partners: including tasks, questions, and discussion boards to explore transition experiences and engagement with support. • Engaging with stakeholders from the Ministry of Defence, charities, and other organisations to map the transition journey, identify existing support, and explore reasons for underutilisation.
1	What are the opportunities for family-specific interventions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic analysis of all data from the rapid evidence review, online community, behavioural journey mapping and stakeholder engagement.

1

2	What do service partners want and need from transition support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full-day deliberative style co-creation workshop with 18 service partners and 10 stakeholders to explore needs, create support network maps, develop guiding principles, and generate intervention ideas.
2	What could creative behavioural change intervention ideas look like using behavioural science?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refining intervention ideas developed in the workshop using behavioural science principles to form a long list of potential interventions.
2	What do key stakeholders working in transition support-related organisations believe is feasible and impactful for new transition support tools/services?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A prioritisation workshop with stakeholders to address and prioritise interventions using the APEASE framework for feasibility and impact.
2	What works in terms of ideas and based on feedback what are the recommendations for future roll out?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of prototypes based on three ideas • User testing with 42 service partners and ex-serving personnel to test the prototypes online, provide feedback on usability, relevance and improvements. • Six one-to-one interviews with serving partners to provide deeper contextual insights on the prototypes.

7.3 Serving personnel's transition journey

As specified by FiMT and Future Agenda (2021)² This journey provided a starting point for our research design. The summary of each stage is as follows:

1. Joining (0-4 years): Exploration of military life before signing a contract; initial experiences such as cadets or socialising with soldiers; consideration of the Armed Forces alongside other life paths.
2. Serving (2-35 years): Active service period covering all duties, roles, responsibilities, and armed forces activities.

² Pharoah, R. (2021). Lifting Our Sights: The Transition Journey (Qualitative ethnographic research report). Future Agenda & Forces in Mind Trust.

3. Preparing (10 mins - 6 months): Activities during service aimed at post-service life, including resettlement programmes, mental preparation, and discussions with family/friends. Preparation can vary greatly—some experience formal resettlement, others face abrupt endings.
4. Threshold (1 day): The exact moment of leaving the Armed Forces, legally moving from soldier to civilian.
5. Confronting (1 week - 5+ years): Immediate post-service period marked by uncertainty, identity challenges, and cultural adjustment to civilian life. Duration depends on prior preparation and individual circumstances.
6. Integrating (1-5+ years): Active efforts to adapt to civilian life, often involving multiple jobs, homes, or relationships. It is a period of seeking stability but not yet settled.
7. Settling (1-2 years): Achieving stability in key areas such as home, family, and work.
8. Landing (∞): Full resolution and consolidation of a civilian identity.

7.4 A flow diagram of the methodology



7.5 Participant samples

Phase 1 - Online communities participant

Characteristic	Participant	Characteristic	Participant
Military branch of Service person		Gender	
Army	19	Male	7
RAF	10	Female	32
Navy	10		
Location		Gender of service person	
England	16	Partner of a female Service person	8
Wales	4	Same sex relationship	6
Scotland	7		
Norther Ireland	10		
Overseas	2		
Rank of Service person			
Junior	4		
Officer	9		
Senior NCO	14		
NCO	12		

Phase 2 - Deliberative style co-creation workshop participant

CATEGORY	CRITERIA	RECRUITED
TOTAL	OVERALL	18
Age	20-34	3
	35-44	11
	45+	4
Gender	Female	17
	Man	1
Ethnicity	White	17

	Ethnic minority	1
Location	England	12
	Wales	2
	Scotland	1
	Northern Ireland	2
	Based overseas	1
What age range is your partner in?	20-34	3
	35-44	9
	45+	6
How would you describe the gender of your spouse / partner (the Service person)?	Female	3
	Man	15
Which organisation is your partner currently serving in?	Marines	6
	RAF	3
	Army	7
	Navy	2
	Other	/

Phase 2 - User testing participant

Category	Final Recruit (42)
Partners of Serving people (37)	Female (22) Male (14)
Ex-serving person (5)	Male (5)

Service	Army (25) Navy (10) RAF (7)
Location	England (31) Wales (1) Scotland (9) N/A (1)

7.6 Full list of participating stakeholder organisations (Phase 1 & Phase 2)

Ministry of Defence
Families, Transition, DBS

Royal Navy

Royal Air Force (RAF)

RAF Families Federation

Naval Families Federation

Cobseo

Reed in Partnership

QinetiQ

Forces Employment Charity

7.7 Support network map



Map 1. Combined input from five co-creation workshop groups

- Sticky notes show the identified support services and network.
- Helpful supports are highlighted in red.
- Supports with good communication are highlighted in blue.

iii) Seamless integration with support services

- There is a frustration with informal channels and information sources, such as Whatsapp groups, Facebook, and social media
- Provide an official, credible touchpoint that consolidate trusted information and reach wider audience
- Integrate the tool within existing support landscape and processes to ensure consistency
- Need buy-in from support service providers to maintain accurate information and handovers
- Embed tools within official services to reduce reliance on informal channels or gatekeepers.

iv) Overcome communication challenges

- There are still existing challenges such as GDPR constraints, serving personnel being gatekeeper of information, and limited reach to families living outside military accommodation or partners living separately
- Better communication channel to directly reach serving families rather than through serving personnel
- Awareness and promotion are felt to be the main challenge

7.9 Additional behaviour change opportunities - Interventions beyond the scope of the testing round

From a long list of nine co-created intervention ideas, we focused on testing three shortlisted ideas that were most suitable for testing at this stage. The following co-created ideas were agreed by stakeholders to be of high priority (ranking relatively higher against the APEASE criteria). Whilst not tested in this round, the remaining ideas remain important and represent valuable opportunities for future development, requiring broader system shift and cross-sector collaboration for successful delivery.

1. A system that recognises and empowers serving families

It is important to recognise that meaningful improvements to transition support for the partners of serving and ex-serving personnel will ultimately require significant system-level consideration in addition to individual targeted solutions. Current provision is fragmented, inconsistently communicated and often designed around the individual who served, rather than the wider family unit. Whilst this research did not seek to redesign the system itself, it highlights the need for stakeholders to consider more fundamental changes to how transition support for families is structured, coordinated and delivered in the future. Especially, the following co-created ideas propose a system-level shift that

includes and acknowledges serving families as part of the extended Armed Forces community.

The proposed ideas include a **Family service ID**, a unique access ID for serving families to use an online platform that provides useful information, tools, and benefits to support transitions, such as the Discover My Benefits page and other existing support services. This approach helps overcome a previously identified barrier: the serving person is often a “gatekeeper” of communication. It also provides a direct means to contact and engage with serving family members.

Another suggested idea was to extend existing **training credits** (e.g., learning credits, resettlement grants) or training opportunities to the whole family unit, allowing partners or children to upskill and use remaining credits, especially if the serving person does not utilise them.

Whilst these ideas are identified as having significant potential to improve a smoother transition for families into civilian life, implementing them involves complex changes and challenges. During the stakeholder APEASE workshop, the following challenges and opportunities were discussed as future talking points:

- **Regulatory complexity** HMRC rules and tax-free status create challenges around the transferability of benefits, as well as security challenges of integrating with MOD
- **Leveraging existing support partners** There is existing infrastructure and resources to deliver skills training for service leavers, but not the same for serving partners. However, stakeholders noted that existing support outside MOD already offers training and education, presenting opportunities to leverage and align existing support services
- **Seamless integration into the transition journey** Improved or new services should be embedded clearly and coherently within the wider transition journey so that people are aware of the availability of support early on.

2. Overcoming communication challenges: Bridging informal and formal support through peer networks

One of our key findings from the Phase 1 (Identify/Influence) of this research was the importance of a peer network for serving partners. These informal networks provide both practical and emotional support from the people who are on this journey together, and who understand the unique challenges of military family life. Earlier, we found out that partners often rely on their peer network or word of mouth to access support information, and place high value on peer testimonials for this reason.

However, that doesn't mean existing informal support is working without problems. Partners also expressed frustration with relying on informal channels such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups. Issues include limited access, for example, invite or approval required groups, misinformation where advice may not be applicable across different circumstances, and the burden of navigating these groups. There is also frustration with the platforms themselves. During our co-creation workshop, serving partners explored ways to overcome the limitations of both formal channels - which often fail to reach a wider audience - and informal channels - misinformation or accessibility issues. The first idea proposed solution was a space for families moderated by **peer moderators**. This would be a self-regulated space facilitated by trained and incentivised service family members to ensure information is accurate and up to date. Features could include discussion boards for key topics, some highlighted support information, frequently asked questions, and live discussions between peers.

This could be implemented either by scaling up existing forums with trained peer moderators or by building a new bespoke platform. Stakeholders felt this could be an effective solution if moderator training were regular and supported by formal support (i.e. MOD, charities). This idea was seen as valuable not only for families who are going through transition, but also if implemented earlier in the journey, it can have broader and longer-term impact. Stakeholders also discussed potential expansion of these space, such as host information sessions and briefings. This idea is also felt helpful to reduce isolation by creating a trusted, go-to network for families.

For implementation, both existing Facebook groups and newly created MOD network for serving families were discussed, although partners showed a preference for more formal platform over Facebook.

The second idea, which received the highest relative APEASE prioritisation score among the nine refined ideas, was the concept of **Community Transition Champions**. These would be trained individuals embedded within the service community. Their role would include proactively reach out to new members and welcoming them to the communities, supporting leavers, and organising community events for families.

This can be built on the existing HIVE by introducing families to support services at their key moments, such as moving in or out of service accommodation. Encouraging network nudge, such as asking if they know someone who could benefit from talking to this support service. Also appointing local champions who are service partners for the roles, and proactively contacting families when the service personnel hand over leave notice, by offering pre-booked call slot by default. This idea responds directly to recurring needs identified by service partners: the need for empathetic, personal connection; proactive outreach (as many families do not seek help until it becomes urgent); and a single, trusted point of contact within a complex support landscape.

Both stakeholders and partners agreed this could be effective and impactful if delivered through existing HIVE structures. However, they highlighted the need for a consolidated service name and a tri-service approach to ensure consistency across Services. The hybrid nature of this solution, combining digital and in-person support, was seen as particularly valuable in reaching families who are currently underserved or difficult to reach.

Leveraging social factors and a peer network has a huge potential. Psychological and behavioural science concepts such as social identity, influence, and social norms can increase user engagement and trust. Community-based solutions empower serving families and partners by giving them ownership of the support service and creating a sense of belonging as it aligns with their identity. This has stronger potential for better engagement and sustainability than top-down approaches. For support services, this also enables more efficient delivery and ongoing maintenance by working with the communities.

7.10 Artefacts from Phase 1 research

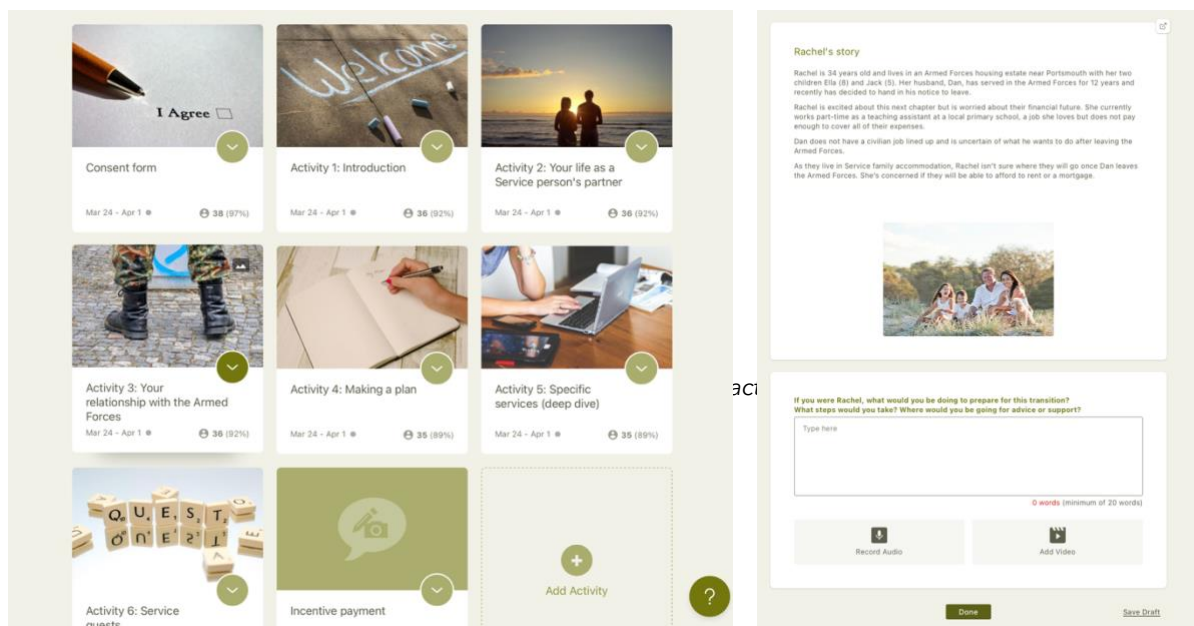


Image 1. Online community example screens

7.11 Individual - Social - Material (ISM) factor analysis of serving partners' barriers and opportunities for successful transition

Individual factors that hold partners back from searching for transition support

- The serving person is not in a 'transition mindset' yet (Beliefs/Attitudes)
For those who haven't yet handed in their notice to leave, there is a belief that *now* is not the right time for transition planning. This perception of when it is 'appropriate' to start planning can be a barrier to transition planning (a challenge consistently emerging in previous research). From a behavioural perspective, this hesitation may result from the empathy gap, which people often underestimate or struggle to imagine in their future circumstances, leading to a reduced sense of urgency to discuss or prepare for something that feels distant.
- Lack of urgency (Motivation)
The level of transition planning varies significantly between couples. Some couples had only high-level planning (e.g. "retire by the beach" or "move abroad"), which may reflect a form of unfounded optimism. The lack of detailed planning may result from concrete vs. abstract bias, where people are less motivated to act when something feels vague, distant, or long-term. Or optimism bias, the belief that "bad things won't happen to us", can also be a barrier for couples from planning for potential challenges in the future.
- Knowledge gaps (Skills/Knowledge/Motivation)
Many partners are unaware of the existing support available to them and have never used it. In fact, most were surprised to see how many resources were available. Often, there is little motivation to seek out support unless it is urgently needed, which results in low knowledge and awareness of the support.
- Cognitive and emotional stress with sudden dismissal (Knowledge/Emotion)
The shock, emotional distress, uncertainty, and shame that follow an abrupt departure can make it even more difficult for partners in this situation to access the support they need. Strong emotional responses can also lead to decision paralysis, where reduced cognitive capacity under stress makes it hard to process information.
- IT Skills (Skills)
While many Service partners are comfortable navigating support through online searches, some face barriers due to limited digital skills or low confidence in using online platforms. This increases reliance on word-of-mouth behaviours and the need for face-to-face support.

Social factors can drive or delay partners from seeking support

- Leaving feels like a loss of identity (Network/Relationship)

Some military partners experience inertia in thinking about transition because they fear losing their identity or sense of community. Being Service family is often a core part of their social identity, when one's sense of self is shaped by the groups they belong to, leaving that group can feel like a loss.

- **The disruption of open communication (Relationship/Habit)**
Open communication is recognised as a key behaviour for military couples in dealing with challenges. However, when a Service person is distressed or unable to connect because they are away, it often leaves their partner to manage family crises alone. Poor communication is a barrier to transition planning, and seeking support is more difficult.
- **Shared understanding with other military partners (Network/Relationship/Identity)**
Partners often turn to those with shared experiences, as military life is unique and challenging for civilians to fully understand. They value word-of-mouth and testimonials when seeking help, as these offer confidence and reassurance through social proof, which provides a sense of safety and reduces the cognitive effort involved in decision-making.
- **The frustration of 'dependence' (Institutions/Norms)**
Partners often feel excluded and labelled as 'dependents', which can be disempowering. This sense of exclusion or rejection may reduce their likelihood of engaging with or trusting formal support services. This may explain why informal community groups (e.g. Facebook or WhatsApp) are a common and trusted source of support for partners.

The Material environment partners live in shapes what they can and can't do

- **Complex processes and military jargon (Infrastructure)**
Navigating military jargon and complex procedures/rules (e.g., pensions, and housing support) can be daunting. The available information is often not tailored to partners' needs, making it difficult to understand what support is available and whether they are entitled to it. This can lead to information overload, creating cognitive fatigue and discouraging engagement.
- **Busy family lives... (Time and Schedule)**
Managing day-to-day responsibilities and conflicting priorities in a busy life often create barriers to accessing support. Partners appreciated accessibility like extended support hours and multi-channel communication that can fit around their busy schedule and support autonomy. Potentially, there may be overestimation in terms of the time needed to engage, leading to procrastination or hesitation in engaging with support.
- **Not available or not out there (Technology)**

While many support services exist, they often fail to stay top of mind for Service families who are focused on daily life rather than actively searching for help and support. When support isn't clearly communicated, proactively delivered, or made salient at the right moments, partners may overlook it or assume it doesn't exist.

7.12 Phase 1 - The result of the brainstorming and prioritisation from the stakeholder workshop II, April 2025

What would have the most impact	What is the lowest hanging fruit (quick fix)
<p>Make it easy Accessible language and terminology</p>	<p>Social Influence Get paired up with someone who has experienced the same issue as you - buddy scheme</p>
<p>Make it easy Consistency of approach including better communication of available support and eligibility throughout serving families.</p>	<p>Reduce cognitive load/Make it easy Bringing things together rather than inventing new</p>
<p>Reduce friction - System Better coordination between support services. Streamlined network of organisations</p>	<p>Reduce friction - Communication Improve clarity on what each organisation does/what not Being clear when something is for families and when it's not Ensuring that support for veterans/serving personnel only is not communicated as support for 'families'</p>
<p>Improve Access, Self-efficacy A dedicated platform for families that does not need any input from serving partner - but also requires support behind it e.g. not signposting to support for veterans/families as an add on</p>	
<p>Improve Skills/Knowledge Improving basic digital skills and data literacy would / should improve their ability to more effectively research online and access digital support / services., raising digital skill and literacy</p>	<p>Awareness & Salience Raise awareness that services like DTS is for families too, that people can call or email or self-refer</p>
<p>Better Access Families Hub with an option for 1-1 support</p>	