Improving Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces

Natalie Fisher and Dilys Robinson (QinetiQ)

Prof Emma Parry and Mengyi Xu (Cranfield School of Management)

Forewords

Tom McBarnet – Director of Programmes, Forces in Mind Trust

Forces in Mind Trust undertook this commission to get behind a frequent observation regarding the challenges, barriers and obstacles besetting the Armed Forces Community facing the prospect of their transition out of Service life and into the civilian world. Service leavers and by association, their families were commonly regarded as being insulated from the realities of 21st century living, of being too cocooned by the life, benefits, entitlements and allowances provided by the Armed Forces to be able to truly appreciate where they would need to prepare most for transition or to understand and plan for the costs and challenges to come. To us in FiMT, who realise that this impression is not totally justified and that the Armed Forces Community live within and amongst UK society too, we realise that the problem works two ways. Firstly, that society at large needs to continually evolve and update its perceptions and come to recognise that the Service person, family or veteran in their midst may be no more or less challenged than their civilian counterpart – but that they may need some consideration and recognition of their particular circumstances arising from service. Secondly, to recognise that for some transition is difficult and that the experience and outcomes are not necessarily positive for all. This suggests there is more that can be done to improve resettlement support but also through life education and development of a predominantly young work force, the better to realise their potential whilst within the Armed Forces and also their prospects for success beyond.

This study helpfully seeks to 'unpack the reality' and to objectively place the Armed Forces-related challenge in context with similarly entitled initiatives for other demographic groupings in society. It is helpful to understand that life skills support is provided in many other settings by organisation such as Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education Life Skills course; Barnardo's; Barclays Life Skills; Novus; and British Telecom (BT) Skills for Tomorrow to name a few. Further, in rightly acknowledging and championing the incredible richness, diversity and individuality of the Armed Forces Community, the report finds the Armed Forces themselves can continue to improve support for them in a fast-changing world that continues to evolve beyond the intent, capacities and reach of existing measures. Recent MOD reviews indicate that Service personnel continue to demand more of 'their employer' and the opportunity to develop experience and knowledge is a key incentive for many. While there may not always be exact alignment of the life skills required for military service and those considered appropriate for transition, a future possibility of more fluid careers at least warrants a review of existing initiatives.

Forces in Mind Trust's mission is that all ex-Service persons and their families make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. We value our relationship with those who hold the levers to make our vision a reality. I therefore commend this report to our MOD and Single Service stakeholders and invite them to consider the findings and recommendations with an open mind, but also in the spirit of there always being room for constructive evaluation and continuous improvement.

Helen Helliwell – Director Armed Forces People Policy at the Ministry of Defence

Life Skills are key skills that are often developed during a career in the Armed Forces and can help to empower Service personnel and their families to achieve their intended goals both in Service and beyond. I welcome the findings of this report that most Service Personnel and their partners consider themselves to have a good level of life skills. However, it also usefully highlights the small minority who are most affected by poor life skills and where resources may best be focused in future.

In recognising the uniqueness of Service life, the Ministry of Defence, working together with partners across Government and the Private Sector, offers a significant package of support to the Armed Forces community that helps the transition back to civilian life. This includes apprenticeship opportunities to develop a range of skills and qualifications recognised in the civilian world, employment support through the Career Transition Partnership, and a bespoke information and support service – delivered by Defence Transition Services for those service leavers who need extra support.

This report also offers a useful set of resources, in particular case studies from existing civilian Life Skills programmes, from which lessons can be learnt, as well as providing frameworks for measuring both the maturity of Life Skills programmes and assessing the outcomes achieved. I would encourage colleagues to read this report and make use of the resources contained within as we continue to develop the Life Skills Programme within Defence and empower individuals and their families to thrive both in and after service.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Background

Life Skills support people to function well, enabling them to deal with the demands and challenges that they encounter in daily life. For those transitioning out of the Armed Forces, having a strong set of Life Skills is therefore crucial. Whilst the majority of ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful transition into civilian life and leave with valuable experience and skills, some struggle. A 'lack of life skills' or 'lack of civilian skills' are phrases sometimes used to describe the limited awareness of the norms and practices understood by civilian society (Brewer & Herron, 2018). Previous research (Pharoah, 2020) has identified several areas, including finance, housing, employment and emotional adjustment, in which ex-Service personnel and their families are unprepared and lack the tools to overcome challenges encountered in civilian life. Veteran research (SERIO, 2021) has also highlighted a broader deficit in Life Skills that is associated with a wider lack of resilience to: be able to cope with normal bureaucracy and personal administration; understand how to find and access avenues for help and support such as welfare benefits or social services; prevent setbacks from multiplying and compounding themselves to the detriment of family; or retain the sense of worth and self-confidence that underpins basic coping mechanisms.

Study Aims

The aim of this study was to answer the following questions.

- What are Life Skills?
- What is the current Life Skills deficit in the Armed Forces community, and what accounts for this deficit?
- Which Life Skills are most important for Service personnel and their spouses/partners in ensuring they make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life? What are their main concerns in being able to adjust both individually and as a family?
- What support is currently available to develop or improve Life Skills for adults generally (within and outside the Armed Forces)?
- Which monitoring and assessment tools could be used to measure the effectiveness of any future Life Skills programme for serving personnel and their spouses/partners?

Method

A mixed-methods approach was taken, as follows, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data.
- A review of relevant literature, both from the UK and overseas.
- Eleven stakeholder interviews with employers, relevant bodies and Service charities.
- An online survey of serving personnel (151 valid responses) and spouses/partners of serving personnel (51 valid responses).
- A review of the evidence on the effectiveness of existing Life Skills programmes, leading to the production of five case studies on: Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education Life Skills course; Barnardo's; Barclays LifeSkills; Novus; and British Telecom (BT) Skills for Tomorrow.
- A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and research team workshops to create a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of provision for developing Life Skills within the Armed Forces.

Key Findings

Describing Life Skills

Life Skills are widely acknowledged as essential in enabling individuals to navigate their everyday lives effectively. These skills are multifaceted and encompass knowledge, values, attitudes, and competencies that are essential for personal development, lifelong learning, and success in various domains. However, there lacks a single definition of Life Skills as these skills are context-dependent and can vary widely. To address this, the team adopted the definition by Robinson, Bowyer, Miller, Rickard, and McNamara (2014) that defines Life Skills as *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours*

that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes" (p. 2). This definition is broad and comprehensive, thus allowing it to be used across multiple contexts, as well as providing a useful summation of other published definitions.

The evidence review found nothing to refute the original model of Life Skills in Defence developed by Robinson et al. (2014), indicating that the three levels: 1) foundation skills; 2) complex skills and abilities; and 3) outcomes, and the specific Life Skills contained in each level, remain valid/relevant. However, whilst the framework remains valid, it is clear that the scope of Life Skills has expanded with changing economic and societal demands and as such new skills have been added and the framework updated as part of this study as follows.

- **Foundation skills:** basic skills (literacy, numeracy, Information Communication Technology (ICT), communications); self-awareness/self-management; financial literacy; digital literacy; managing identity disruption; and ability to manage own learning.
- **Complex skills and abilities:** negotiation and influence; interpersonal skills; self-presentation; decision-making; problem-solving; self-discipline; planning; adaptive communication; cognitive-behavioural skills; goal-setting skills; work-life balancing skills; coping skills; networking skills; critical thinking/innovative thinking; and emotional intelligence.
- **Outcomes:** employability; citizenship; practical living (financial, health, hygiene, accommodation); social competence; resilience/adaptability; personal growth; wellbeing; and entrepreneurship.

Life Skills Deficit in the Armed Forces Community

The findings suggest that overall there is not a significant issue with Life Skills in the Armed Forces community. Most serving personnel and spouses/partners assessed themselves as having good Life Skills, as stakeholders expected. The small minority most affected by poor Life Skills (and in need of more support) tend to be those lower in rank and younger in age, who have not had the chance to develop their skills, or who had poor Life Skills on joining. Comparatively, individuals are more likely to be affected by poor Life Skills if they are without a trade; serving in the Army; struggling with mental health issues; and non-UK citizens. However, it is clear that more practical help is needed to get people the support required to develop their Life Skills.

The reason Life Skills poses a problem for some was largely attributed to the Armed Forces lifestyle: the impact of mobility (resulting in a lack of continuity of adult education) and not having to do things for themselves (leading to a lack of opportunity to hone certain skills). The findings certainly suggest that Life Skills are developed over time, with age and experience, with those living a more independent life from the Armed Forces being better equipped having operationalised some of these key Life Skills before leaving.

Whilst it is clear that serving personnel and their families would like support across a range of different skills, there are some specific areas in which increased help would be particularly useful. This includes: applying for jobs; financial/money skills; digital/Information Technology (IT) skills (serving personnel); assistance with self-confidence; mental wellbeing; and help with the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life.

Important Life Skills for a Successful Transition

Pinpointing the specific impact of Life Skills on transition is challenging because of the interlinked nature of factors. Only a few previous researchers have attempted to explore the association between the development of particular Life Skills and transition outcomes. Those that have, suggest that coping skills, adaptability, self-awareness in identity shift, self-determination, and transferable skills are crucial Life Skills for military personnel and that employability, networking skills and self-confidence are important for spouses/partners. When asked directly, serving personnel and spouses/partners cited: employability; financial/money skills; self-confidence; and applying for jobs as the most important skills. This would suggest that, for many, a successful transition is still largely defined by finding a job.

The Life Skills most frequently cited by stakeholders as important for a successful transition were financial skills and resilience, closely followed by problem-solving. Although recognised as an important skill by both groups, neither serving personnel nor spouses/partners rated financial/money skills in the top five Life Skills that they felt they already possessed. In fact, many stakeholders reported financial literacy as a Life Skill which Service leavers struggle with the most. This would suggest that financial literacy is a key Life Skill for transition, and one that is not fully developed at the point of leaving.

Concerns Adjusting to Civilian Life

Concerns largely fall into two categories: practical; and emotional/psychological adjustment. Study findings suggest a preoccupation with gaining practical Life Skills that will specifically help personnel to obtain employment on leaving, at the

expense of what might be described as 'softer skills'. This is interesting considering that serving personnel reported being more concerned with the emotional/psychological adjustment, which they anticipated as being more difficult than the practical adjustment. Specifically, some acknowledged a readjustment in family dynamics, which perhaps requires support.

Support Available to Improve Life Skills

Life Skills provision within Defence involves providing guidance and signposting to required support and is delineated from training, education and other skills. Training is provided through apprenticeship and programmes offered at Armed Forces training units and education centres, including functional skills development. Whilst it could be said that the MOD offers more in this space than many employers, there appear to be gaps in the provision of Life Skills development, such as a lack of formal support to encourage personnel to extend their knowledge, skills, and abilities. There are also qualitative gaps in how Life Skills support is delivered, who receives it, and when, and those who leave early with the lowest level of Life Skills receive the least support. The single Services are responsible for delivering Life Skills support and the approach can vary between them. However, a common approach on leaving is evident. Service leavers receive a resettlement package through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and further development of Life Skills as part of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy. The MOD also has a Service Leavers' Guide (MOD, 2020) for those thinking about, and in the process of, transitioning to civilian life. This guide is in the process of being 'rebranded' into a through-career handrail for Service, including Life Skills advice, information and guidance. This is a welcome update, as the evidence would suggest that current provision is not reaching personnel as intended. Survey responses indicate that the vast majority of spouses/partners had not received any Life Skills support from the Armed Forces. Further to this, over half of serving personnel and nearly three quarters of spouses/partners said that they did not know how to access Life Skills support should they need it.

Outside Defence, a variety of programmes exist to help adults improve their Life Skills. These programmes are often aimed at young adults and/or people who are societally disadvantaged. Whilst they all vary according to the context and purpose (which drives the approach), there are commonalities amongst them. There are also a number of lessons, as follows, that can be learned from these examples, which are of relevance to Defence.

- People emerging from a relatively structured environment need both practical and emotional help to enable them to live independently and form new social networks in their community.
- Whilst there is a focus on foundation skills, there is also recognition that complex skills and outcomes are important to develop. These more complex skills (e.g. interpersonal skills, self-awareness, self-presentation etc.) are considered very important to employers.
- Whilst societally disadvantaged and vulnerable people can indeed benefit from Life Skills input, so can a broader group, including those in professional roles.
- The BT Skills for Tomorrow materials, such as the 'how to' guides, could be very useful in terms of practical support for Service leavers and their families; the Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

Measuring the Effectiveness of Life Skills Programmes

Having reviewed the plethora of monitoring and assessment tools, the team have developed their own two frameworks: the first to enable evaluation of the maturity of Life Skills provision as a whole across the Armed Forces; and the second to assess reactions and outcomes to specific aspects of life skills development (e.g. particular development programmes) at an individual or organisational level. Both are needed if the Armed Forces are to understand the effectiveness of their Life Skills provision and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation. Before rolling them out, it is suggested that these frameworks are tested and adjusted (as necessary) via the conduct of a pilot trial.

Conclusions

Whilst only a small minority of personnel identify as having poor Life Skills, within this, there are some groups more affected than others. In this way, Life Skills might best be described as a low-prevalence problem that has high impact amongst the small community that are most affected. Whilst there are clearly groups more in need of support than others, the findings also indicate a strong desire from many to receive support to develop their Life Skills. What is needed/wanted varies widely, indicating that personnel require support with different skills and that a 'one size fits all' solution is not the answer. The findings also point to a difference between the Life Skills that are important whilst serving compared with leaving. The data show that the Life Skills personnel rated as their top five skills bear no resemblance to those they consider to be most important for transition (with the exception of communication skills for serving personnel). This would suggest

a gap or a disconnect between the Life Skills that are both developed and perceived as important by personnel whilst serving and those needed outside this environment, the indication being that some Life Skills take on greater importance outside Defence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, a series of recommendations have been made, mainly for the MOD.

- The MOD should adopt a single definition and framework of Life Skills to confirm that all personnel have the same understanding of what Life Skills are and what they comprise. This definition should be: *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes"* (Robinson et al., 2014). It should be incorporated into JSP 100. Coupled with this, Defence should also adopt the Life Skills framework (shown in Section 7) for serving personnel, veterans and their spouses/partners. Prior to adoption, the framework should be further validated and piloted before being rolled out more broadly across the community.

- To ensure serving personnel and spouses/partners are both suitably equipped during their service and prepared on leaving, Defence should provide greater Life Skills support in the following areas: financial/money skills; digital/IT skills (for serving personnel); assistance with self-confidence; mental wellbeing; applying for jobs; and help with the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life.

- Whilst developing practical foundation skills are important, this should not be at the detriment of complex skills and abilities, especially when considering employment. The MOD should provide the opportunity to develop these skills too during Service.

- All information provided to support Life Skills development (e.g. the Army's 'Transition to Civilian Life' information sheets, Service Leavers Guide etc.) must be delivered in such a manner that it as accessible and useful to all personnel, including neurodiverse individuals and those who may otherwise struggle. It could also be useful to make accessing this information a mandatory part of training to ensure that all personnel have reviewed it.

- Whilst providing guidance and signposting to required Life Skills support will be sufficient for many, for those most affected by poor Life Skills (and least likely to reach out for help), further help and support is needed. For these groups, Life Skills inputs need to go beyond just signposting, to more classroom-based and/or practical support. One way to achieve this could be for Defence to continue to endeavour to make it possible for Service personnel to establish a life outside the military (e.g. living in their own accommodation, spouse/partner in employment), which would provide opportunities to operationalise or hone their Life Skills whilst in service so they are better equipped for life after the Armed Forces.

- As supported by JSP 100, transition out of the Armed Forces should start far earlier in the career of a serving person so that military personnel can acquire the skills they need for leaving throughout their military career. This should include active consideration of their Life Skills and where further development might be required. The MOD should make it clear how the skills they teach are useful outside the military.

- To help address stigma around help-seeking behaviour, Defence needs to create a psychologically safe culture/environment in which people are comfortable to admit that they are lacking certain skills and are able to ask for help.

- To identify who is likely to be most affected and in need of support, a risk-based model should be developed that identifies individuals who are at greatest risk of Life Skills problems both during Service and on leaving (e.g. those lower in rank and younger in age who have not had the chance to develop their skills, those with poor Life Skills on joining, etc.). Creating this risk-based model would allow the MOD to direct their provision more effectively and limit the need for help-seeking behaviour, thus providing these groups with more targeted support.

- The MOD should look to make use of existing Life Skills resources. Outside the Defence setting there are available sources such as the BT Skills for Tomorrow 'how to' guides, which could be very useful in terms of practical support for Service leavers and their families; the Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

- The evaluation frameworks developed to assess Life Skills provision should be implemented into Defence, both into the MOD centre and Front Line Commands. Prior to roll out, the frameworks should be piloted and tested and adjusted as required.

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BT	British Telecom
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CPPE	Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education
CTP	Career Transition Partnership
CV	Curriculum Vitae
FiMT	Forces in Mind Trust
FTSE	Financial Times Stock Exchange
GP	General Practitioner
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
JSP	Joint Service Publication
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NHS	National Health Service
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAF	Royal Air Force
REA	Rapid Evidence Assessment
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization
WIS	Wounded, Injured and Sick
WP	Work Package
YOI	Young Offenders Institution

Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 – Study Background

Life Skills support people to function well, enabling them to deal with the demands and challenges that they encounter in daily life. For those transitioning out of the Armed Forces, having a strong set of Life Skills is therefore crucial. Whilst the majority of ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful transition into civilian life and leave with valuable experience and skills, some struggle. A 'lack of life skills' or 'lack of civilian skills' are phrases sometimes used to describe the limited awareness of the norms and practices understood by civilian society (Brewer & Herron, 2018). Previous research (Pharoah, 2020) has identified several areas, including finance, housing, employment and emotional adjustment, in which ex-Service personnel and their families are unprepared and lack the tools to overcome challenges encountered in civilian life. Veteran research (SERIO, 2021) has also highlighted a broader deficit in Life Skills that is associated with a wider lack of resilience to: be able to cope with normal bureaucracy and personal administration; understand how to find and access avenues for help and support such as welfare benefits or social services; prevent setbacks from multiplying and compounding themselves to the detriment of family; or retain the sense of worth and self-confidence that underpins basic coping mechanisms.

1.2 – Research Questions

To better understand the context of the above, and to support Forces in Mind Trust's (FiMT) mission to enable ex-Service personnel and their families to make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life, a targeted study into the current Life Skills deficit in the Armed Forces community was conducted. The aim of this study was to answer the following questions.

- What are Life Skills?
- What is the current Life Skills deficit in the Armed Forces community, and what accounts for this deficit?
- Which Life Skills are most important for Service personnel and their spouses/partners in ensuring they make a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life? What are their main concerns in being able to adjust both individually and as a family?
- What support is currently available to develop or improve Life Skills for adults generally (within and outside the Armed Forces)?
- Which monitoring and assessment tools could be used to measure the effectiveness of any future Life Skills programme for serving personnel and their spouses/partners?

1.3 – Report Structure

This report is structured in the following way.

- Section 1: Introduction.
- Section 2: Method.
- Section 3: Literature review.
- Section 4: Survey and stakeholder interview findings.
- Section 5: Case studies of Life Skills programmes.
- Section 6: Framework for evaluating Life Skills provision.
- Section 7: Conclusions.
- Section 8: Recommendations.
- Appendix A: Participant profile.
- Appendix B: List of Life Skills.
- Appendix C: Full case studies.
- Appendix D: Evaluation models/frameworks.

Section 2 – Method

2.1 – Technical Approach

A mixed-methods approach was taken, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data across five Work Packages (WPs) (see Figure 2-1).
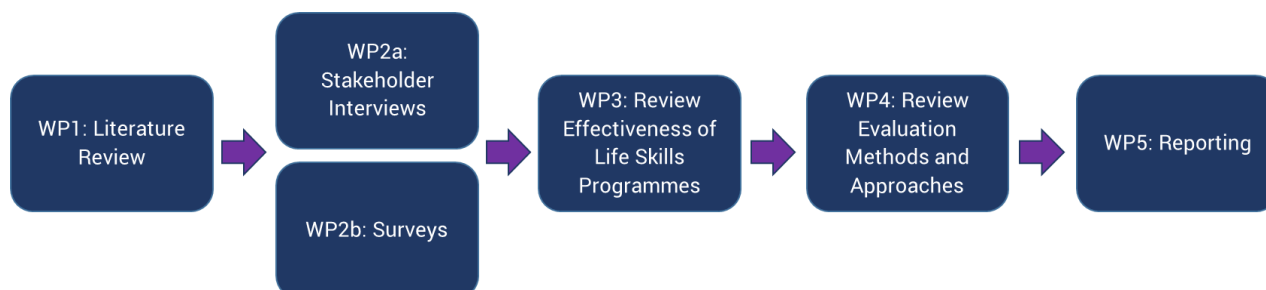
Figure 2-1: Overview of technical approach

2.2 – Advisory Group

At the start of the study, an Advisory Group was established to help guide/steer and provide feedback during the lifecycle of the project. This select group of seven people comprised representatives from employers, relevant bodies and Service charities. They provided support and input to a range of activities including: the development of research materials; survey administration and awareness; support with data collection; input to the evaluation framework; and views on the recommendations.

2.3 – WP1: Literature Review

The following methodology was used to conduct the literature review.

1. Review parameters: Development of a search strategy using keywords and search strings to systematically search databases for relevant literature.
2. Searching: Application of the keyword strategy to identified databases. Searches were enhanced through the application of advanced search options available in many of the databases. All relevant evidence was managed in a bibliographic software programme where the full text could be stored.
3. Screening: Inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed and implemented to screen for relevant evidence and used to determine which studies to include or exclude from the review.
4. Extraction and synthesis: Included evidence was reviewed using a framework to record, analyse and synthesise key information.
5. Reporting: Synthesised evidence is presented in this report.

This search strategy was applied to the following four academic databases.

- EBSCOhost (Business Source Complete, American Psychological Association Psychinfo, American Psychological Association PsycArticles, eBook Collection, ERIC, E-Journals).
- Scopus.
- ProQuest.
- Emerald Insight.

A search of the grey and practitioner literature was also undertaken using Internet search engines (e.g. Google). This was supplemented with searches of relevant websites, and studies undertaken for the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and other bodies that were either known to the research team or recommended by others. The identified evidence was then reviewed and screened according to a range of inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 2-1 provides an overview of the keywords and search strings identified and applied to the databases via the Cranfield University library, and the inclusion/exclusion criteria used.

Table 2-1: Keyword search terms and phrases

Stage	Description
Search terms/strings:	String 1: "define* life skills"
	String 2: "train*" or "learn*" or "develop*" or "improve*"
	String 3: "impact" or "support"
	String 4: "transit*"
	String 5: "Armed Forces" or "military" or "veteran" or "serving personnel" or "the spouse/partner of Armed Forces personnel" or "care leavers" or "resettlement" or "NEET" or "Retirement" or "Prisoners" or "Young offenders"
	String 6: "civilian life"
Search strategy:	String 1 "life skills"
	String 1,2 "life skills" and "train*" or "learn*" or "develop*" or "improve*"
	String 1,2,3 e.g. "impact" or "support" and "life skills train*"
	String 1,5 e.g. "life skills" and "Armed Forces"
	String 1,2,5 e.g. "life skills train*" and "Armed Forces"
	String 1,2,3,5 e.g. "impact" or "support" and "life skills training" "Armed Forces"
	String 1,4,5 e.g. "life skills" and "transit*" and "Armed Forces"
	String 1,4,5,6 e.g. "life skills" and "transit*" and "Armed Forces" and "civilian life"
Inclusion criteria:	• English literature published since 2013
	• Peer-reviewed for academic literature
	• Reporting work with adult participants
	• Full-text available
	• Different population groups:
	○ young people leaving care provided by the local authority
	○ those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)
	○ those approaching retirement
	○ prisoners (and prison leavers)
	○ young offenders (and those leaving youth custody)
	• Different countries:
	Life Skills initiatives/programmes take place within the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom (UK) and overseas (e.g. Armed Forces in the United States (US))
Exclusion criteria:	Anything out of the inclusion criteria
	Studies focusing on employability in secondary and higher education

The resulting academic articles were screened for quality via a critical review of the method and sample used. Figure 2-2 provides a summary of the results of the searches from each academic database following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria and screening for quality.
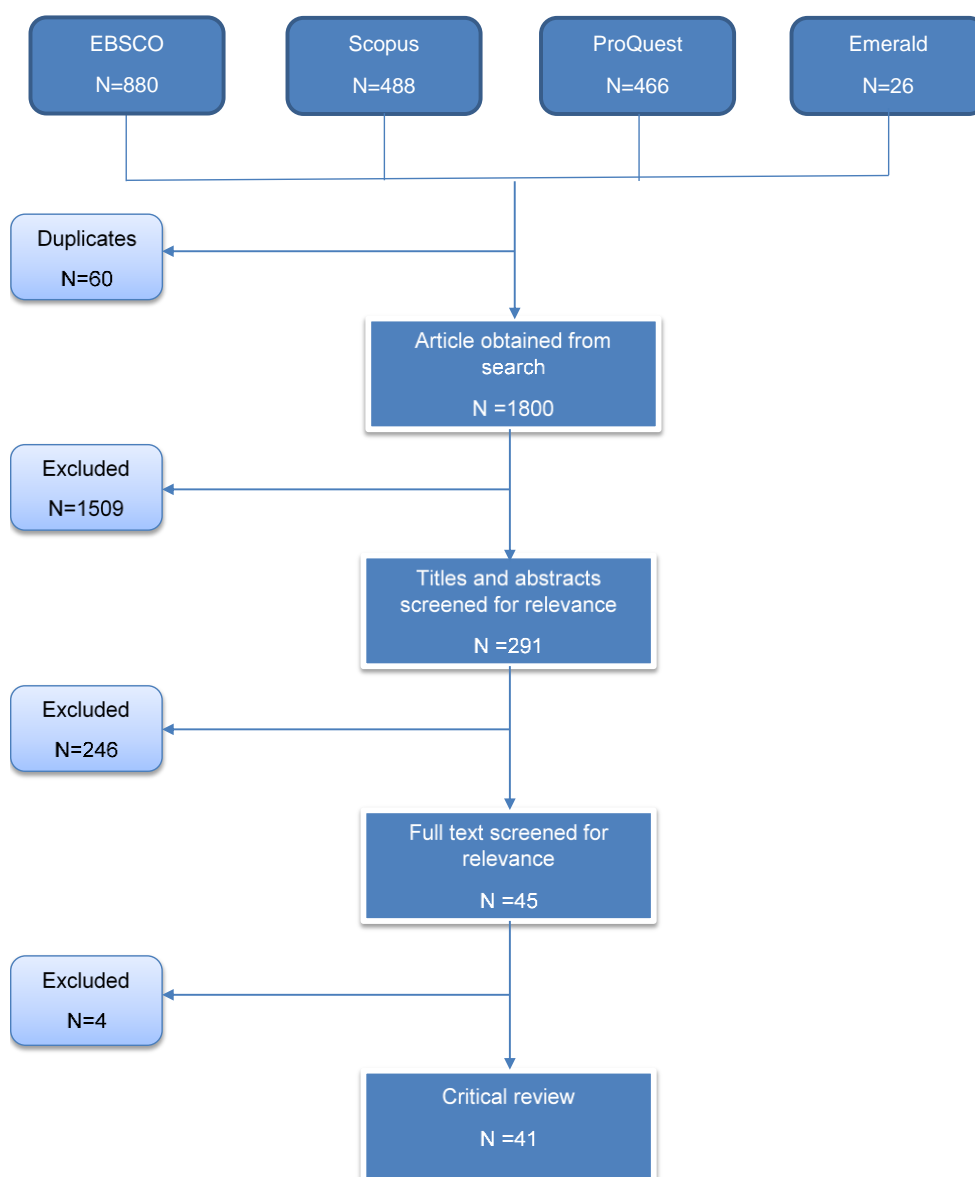
Figure 2-2: Search Results

2.4 – WP2a: Stakeholder Interviews

A total of 11 telephone interviews with representatives from 10 organisations were conducted to better understand the Life Skills deficit in the Armed Forces community and what accounts for this deficit. Interviews were conducted with employers of veterans (N=3), Service charities (N=3) and other relevant bodies (N=4). Stakeholder organisations were selected on the basis that they would offer a range of perspectives on serving personnel/veterans and their families from different vantage points.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed using initial findings from the literature review and the expertise of the research team. The questions explored: the key concerns of ex-Service personnel in being able to adjust to civilian life both individually and as a family; which Life Skills Service leavers/veterans and their spouses/partners struggle most with; which Life Skills are most important for serving personnel and their spouses/partners in ensuring they make a successful and sustainable transition; the current Life Skills deficit in the Armed Forces community and what accounts for this deficit; whether Defence does enough to equip/prepare serving personnel and their spouses/partners with the Life Skills they need in order to thrive in civilian life; whether ex-Service personnel and their spouses/partners know where to go for Life Skills support; and what, if any, Life Skills support their organisation offers to ex-Service personnel/veterans and their spouses/partners.

Interviews took place between September and December 2022. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes with comprehensive notes being taken and typed up. The data were analysed using thematic analysis: *"a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data"* (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6).

2.5 – WP2b: Surveys

Two online surveys were developed: one for serving personnel; and one for spouses/partners of serving personnel[1].

Questions were developed based on initial findings from the literature review and stakeholder interviews. They related to the following topics.

- Perceived level of Life Skills.
- Life Skills development and support.
- Life Skills required for a successful transition.
- Preparedness to leave the Armed Forces.
- Life Skills support during resettlement.

Demographic questions (e.g. age, gender) and background information relevant to their/their serving spouse/partner's time in service (e.g. Service, rank, length of service) were also asked to allow understanding of the sample composition. To aid interpretation of the data, there were options for respondents to provide written responses to some survey questions.

To be eligible to take part in the survey, personnel had to be aged 18 years or over and either: currently serving in the UK Armed Forces (including Royal Navy/Army/Royal Air Force (RAF)/Royal Marines and those undergoing resettlement); or a spouse/partner of somebody currently serving in the UK Armed Forces (including Royal Navy/Army/RAF/Royal Marines and those undergoing resettlement).

Before administration, ethical approval to conduct the online surveys was sought from the MOD Research Ethics Committee. Following some minor amendments, approval was received in December 2022.

The online surveys were hosted on Snap Surveys (both surveys were accessible via the same link). In order to raise awareness of the study the surveys were advertised by multiple organisations (e.g. the MOD, Service charities) via a range of communication channels (e.g. social media, internal forums and networks). The surveys were open for four months between January and May 2023.

On closure of the survey, data were downloaded into a spreadsheet. After data cleansing, 202 responses were available for data analysis: 151 responses from serving personnel; and 51 from spouses/partners of serving personnel.

2.5.1 – Reporting the Survey Data

The following are of note when considering the survey responses.

- Not all questions were mandatory, so the number of participants responding to each question varies and does not always equate to the total sample sizes (i.e. 151 for serving personnel or 51 for spouses/partners).
- Question filtering was used in the survey. This means that some questions were presented to a sub-set of respondents only. For example, only those who were currently undergoing resettlement were presented with questions relating to this topic.
- In some instances, the data from several response options to a question have been combined. For example, when reporting level of agreement, the number of respondents selecting 'strongly agree' and 'agree' have been summed to derive an overall figure and percentage representing the extent of agreement.
- Not every response option to a question is reported in the text. For example, 'not applicable' or 'neither agree nor disagree' options are sometimes not reported.
- Due to limited number of spouses/partners who responded to the survey, both the percentage and number of responses to a question have been provided in the findings for transparency and to avoid the data being misinterpreted.

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[1] It should be noted that spouses/partners who took part in the survey did not need to be married/in a relationship with a serving person who also took part in the survey; the research team were not looking to match the data. However, it is entirely possible that both partners in a married couple/relationship may have taken part in the surveys.

2.5.2 – Low Survey Responses

Whilst survey response rates in Defence are not typically very high (e.g. the 2023 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey received a response rate of 31% whilst the 2022 Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey received a response rate of 18%), responses to the Life Skills surveys were very low. This was despite the use of various communication channels, repeated attempts to raise awareness of them and allowing additional time for data collection. The research team believe that this may be due to a number of factors, including the following.

- Competing surveys: The 2023 Families Continuous Attitude Survey was live at the same time as the Life Skills survey. There was also a Defence Life Skills survey being circulated at a similar time.
- Survey fatigue/apathy: Military personnel are regularly surveyed. Many have expressed a sense of frustration that they complete surveys and feel as though nothing ever changes.
- Uninterested in the topic: For people to want to complete a survey it needs to be about something that is relevant or interesting to them. Perhaps Life Skills is not a concept they are familiar with or interested in, especially those who consider themselves to have good Life Skills.
- Hard to reach groups: Personnel who have poorer Life Skills are likely to be a difficult group to access and encourage to complete a survey.

2.6 – WP3: Review Effectiveness of Life Skills Programmes

The aim of WP3 was to review existing evidence on the effectiveness of existing Life Skills programmes at improving Life Skills for adults. An online search identified nine possible case study organisations, covering a range of target audiences and offering a variety of content. Open-source material was initially gathered about all nine potential case studies. The list was reduced to six after a scrutiny of the target audiences and content, which led to the removal of three potential programmes due to either overlapping content or participant groups that were less relevant to Defence (e.g. a focus on young people under the age of 18). All six were approached for possible interviews aimed at supplementing the publicly-available material to gain a more thorough understanding of the programmes and how their effectiveness was assessed. Of this six, one was removed due to lack of response combined with a relative scarcity of available material.

The final five case studies, with their rationale for selection, were:

1. Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) Life Skills course: chosen for its focus on professional adults (rather than the more frequently-encountered focus on disadvantaged sections of the population).
2. Barnardo's: chosen for the organisation's support to young adults leaving the care system, and for the variety of programmes offered under the overall Barnardo's umbrella.
3. Barclays LifeSkills: selected because of its focus on employability and its status as a well-known programme offering support to adults.
4. Novus: selected because its activities are aimed entirely at delivering, to the prisoner and young offender population in the UK, the skills to live crime-free on release into the community.
5. British Telecom (BT) Skills for Tomorrow: chosen because of its particular focus on improving the digital skills of the population, and its varied programmes with different target audiences.

All five case study organisations were invited to participate in an interview, with a view to providing additional material not publicly available on their websites. Three organisations agreed, so case studies two, three and five include such material, provided via interviews with individuals in these organisations who were responsible for Life Skills programmes. In total, seven interviews were conducted between August 2022 and January 2023. These three case studies were signed off for publication by the organisations concerned.

2.7 – WP4: Review Evaluation Methods and Approaches

Existing evidence on the effectiveness of monitoring and assessment tools in measuring the success of Life Skills or similar programmes was reviewed via a combination of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) and research team workshops. A REA is a shortened form of systematic review. REAs give a very reliable view of the best available research evidence by systematically searching for and appraising studies (Thomas, Newman, & Oliver, 2013; Barends et al., 2017).

The REA was conducted using the following steps.

1. Define relevant search terms e.g. 'learning evaluation model/framework'.

2. Determine the most relevant research databases e.g. EBSCO, Google Scholar, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) resources and conduct a search in online research databases.
3. Identify the mainstream models and frameworks that are relevant to learning and development evaluation.
4. Conduct a reproducible search on each identified model/framework and identify useful resources for further detailed review.
5. Summarise and review the main findings from the selected resources including definition, content, application context and advantages/disadvantages of models/frameworks relevant to learning and development evaluation.

Following this, the team held a series of workshops to develop a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of provision for developing Life Skills within the Armed Forces.

- The first workshop was used to select the most appropriate existing frameworks and to discuss their efficacy in relation to the Armed Forces. This workshop was used to determine the overall structure of the framework and who the key users should be.
- The second workshop focused on identifying the details within each framework and specifying the relevant measures of action[2], measures of performance[3] and measures of effect[4] that would sit within the framework.
- The last workshop was designed to consider the data that would need to be collected for each of the identified measures. Members of the MOD Life Skills team joined this last workshop to provide feedback on the frameworks and information on the data available in relation to them.

In between each workshop, the framework was further developed based upon the discussions at the previous workshop.

2.8 – WP5: Reporting

The findings from all WPs have been collated and reported in this technical report, which outlines the key findings from the data, an updated Life Skills model, evaluation frameworks and recommendations.

2.9 – Study Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations to the methodological approach that may impact upon the study findings. The following should be noted when reviewing the data.

- The responses to both surveys are very low. This should be born in mind, in particular when reviewing the spouse/partner data.
- The surveys draw upon self-report data. It is possible that personnel are not able to assess their Life Skills accurately and may be using different benchmarks in doing so.
- It is probable that those with poor Life Skills (particularly those who struggle to read/write or who have poor digital skills) are less likely to have taken part in the online surveys.
- Whilst in some ways the survey sample reflects the Armed Forces population (the majority were white, male, and/or Other Ranks) in other ways it does not, i.e. the largest proportion of respondents were from the RAF rather than the Army.
- The low representation of personnel from a diverse range of ethnicities and the fact that all spouses/partners were female means what we have limited information about the Life Skills of those cohorts that fall outside of these groups.
- The majority of the sample were between 30 and 49 years of age, whereas those most affected by poor Life Skills tend to be lower in age, suggesting that the survey may not have tapped into the group most impacted.

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[2] How the Life Skills programme was implemented.
[3] Why the Life Skills programme performs as it does.
[4] The effects that the Life Skills programme has had on outcomes.

Section 3 – Literature Review

This section of the report outlines what is known about Life Skills from existing literature/research. Specifically, it looks to:

- establish what constitute Life Skills by identifying the key components of Life Skills and providing a clearer understanding of what skills need to be developed;
- ascertain what support is available to develop and improve Life Skills generally for the UK Armed Forces community by identifying the programmes, courses, and networks available to the Armed Forces community both in the UK and overseas (US, Australia and Canada); and
- evaluate how Life Skills can impact transition out of the Armed Forces into civilian life for serving personnel and their spouses/partners by assessing the effectiveness of current support mechanisms and identifying areas in which further development is needed.

Key Findings:

- Life Skills are important for individuals to navigate their personal development and lifelong learning and underpin success in learning, employment and social and civic life.
- There lacks an agreed single definition of Life Skills in the literature as they are typically context-dependent and as such can vary.
- This review adopts a broad and context-free definition proposed by Robinson et al. (2014) that defines Life Skills as *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes"* (p. 2).
- Whilst the model of Life Skills developed by Robinson et al. (2014) remains valid, this review identified additional Life Skills that should be incorporated into the original model. These include foundation skills (like financial literacy, digital literacy and managing identity disruption), complex skills (like adaptive communication, cognitive-behavioural skills, work-life balancing skills, coping skills, networking skills, critical thinking/innovative thinking and emotional intelligence) as well as outcomes of Life Skills development such as wellbeing and entrepreneurship.
- Given the context-dependent nature of Life Skills and various career stages of service, it is noted that personnel require different types of Life Skills support and development at the various career stages and during transition.
- Specialised support for Life Skills development is essential for specific groups of veterans, such as wounded/injured/sick personnel and homeless veterans.
- Evaluating the outcomes of Life Skills development programmes is challenging due to the lack of consensus and multiple definitions of Life Skills.
- There is limited literature on the impact of Life Skills on the transition from the Armed Forces. Existing research highlights coping skills, adaptability, self-awareness during identity shift, self-determination, and transferable skills as vital for a successful transition.
- Employability and networking skills are significant for spouses/partners of UK Armed Forces serving personnel, while self-confidence plays a crucial role in their career transition.

3.1 – Overview

This review focuses on the nature and development of Life Skills, both generally and within the UK Armed Forces. Life Skills generally encompass a range of abilities and competencies that enable individuals to manage their daily activities effectively. The development of Life Skills has been identified as contributing to the promotion of personal and social development, the prevention of health and social problems, and the protection of human rights by facilitating the practice and reinforcement of psychosocial skills in a culturally and developmentally appropriate manner (World Health Organization (WHO), 1999). The concept of Life Skills has gained considerable attention in recent years, as there is a growing realisation of their importance in enhancing individual and societal wellbeing. The evidence base for Life Skills is relatively well-developed, with research spanning across various disciplines, including psychology, education, sociology, and public health. However, the definition of Life Skills still lacks agreement due to their variety and dependence on the context.

The importance of Life Skills and their application in promoting personal, family, and occupational health in military personnel is well recognised. Previous research funded by the MOD was undertaken in 2014 (Robinson, Bowyer, Miller, Rickard, & McNamara, 2014) to explore the topic. This research defined Life Skills, audited current provision for their development, and created a model that could inform and direct future provision across Defence. From this research, it was

concluded that the Life Skills provision within the Armed Forces was of relatively high quality; however, some areas for improvement were identified in relation to early Service leavers, the timing of provision and the ability of individuals to manage their own learning and development.

This current review builds on Robinson et al.'s (2014) report, and focuses on evidence that has been produced since this time in order to avoid duplication and to examine what (if anything) has changed. Since the report in 2014, emerging research has indicated a broader deficit in the Life Skills of Service leavers, associated with a wider lack of resilience to be able to cope with normal bureaucracy and personal administration to understand how to find and access avenues for help and support for Life Skills development, to allow setbacks to multiply and compound themselves to the detriment of family, or lose the sense of worth and self-confidence that underpins basic coping mechanisms (SERIO, 2021).

It has also been observed that comparable Armed Forces communities in the US, Australia and Canada have taken a variety of practical approaches towards the provision and development of Life Skills, focusing on financial awareness, digital awareness, effective networking, employability and skills development. To better understand recent research developments and changing contexts for improving Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces, this review builds upon Robinson et al.'s (2014) report to address three main objectives, as follows.

- **To identify what constitute Life Skills.** There remains a lack of agreement on the definition of Life Skills due to their diversity and dependence on the context. This review therefore aims to identify the key components of Life Skills and provide a clearer understanding of what skills need to be developed.
- **To identify what support is available to develop and improve Life Skills generally for the UK Armed Forces community.** This review aims to identify the programmes, courses, and networks available to the Armed Forces community, helping to ensure that support is adequate and accessible. In addition to the UK Armed Forces community, Life Skills support in other nations' Armed Forces (including the US, Australia and Canada) have been reviewed as appropriate.
- **To evaluate how Life Skills can impact transition out of the Armed Forces into civilian life for serving personnel and their spouses/partners.** Transitioning from military to civilian life can be challenging for serving personnel and their spouses/partners. Life Skills can play a critical role in facilitating a successful transition; therefore, this review aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current support mechanisms and identify areas in which further development is needed.

3.2 – Defining Life Skills

In the academic literature, Life Skills are typically construed to underpin competent human functioning and to enable individuals to deal with the demands and challenges that they encounter in daily life. They are seen as not just a set of skills, nor as equal to survival skills, livelihood skills, or vocational skills but are described as cross-cutting applications of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes (UNESCO, 2004). Life Skills are suggested to be important in the process of individual development and lifelong learning and underpin success in learning, employment and social and civic life. Despite their commonality and essentiality, the literature still lacks agreement as to a definition of Life Skills due to their variety and dependence on the context (Hodge, Danish, & Martin, 2013; Robinson et al., 2014). Similarly, the literature from outside academia fails to provide a consistent definition of Life Skills. Online dictionaries define the term very broadly:

> *'A skill that is useful or important in everyone's life'* (Cambridge Dictionary Online)

> *'Skills that are needed to deal effectively with the challenges of everyday life, at school, at work and in personal relationships'* (MacMillan Dictionary Online)

The WHO defines Life Skills as the *"abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable humans to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of life"* (WHO, 1994, p. 1). The British Council has a similar online definition of Life Skills: "a term used to describe a set of basic skills acquired through learning and/or direct life experience that enable individuals and groups to effectively handle issues and problems commonly encountered in daily life". Although these definitions are broad and non-specific, they have in common an emphasis on Life Skills as enabling individuals to navigate everyday life and to tackle effectively any problems they might encounter.

3.2.1 – What Comprises Life Skills?

The academic literature defines Life Skills as comprising sets of social and psychological capabilities used to transform general human life tasks and life challenges into comprehensible, personally sensible, and commonly meaningful and

manageable goals of change (Bertelsen, 2021). Based upon a review of the Life Skills literature, Bertelsen (2013, 2021) divides Life Skills into 10 skills and three dimensions as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1: Ten Life Skills in Life Psychology Summarised by Bertelsen (2013, 2021)

Life Skills Dimensions	Life Skills	Definitions
(a) participation, that is, taking a position from which one can participate in own and common life	Relational skill	This refers to our ability to form and maintain close social relationships with others.
	Framework skill	This skill involves understanding the basic material and activities that make up our lives. It includes things like managing our finances, our daily routines, and our overall lifestyle.
	Community skill	This skill involves making a positive impact on the world around us. It includes things like volunteering, advocating for causes we believe in, and participating in community events.
(b) realistic attunement, concerning realistic, pragmatic, and moral attunement to natural, social, cultural, and societal surroundings	Attentiveness skill	This skill involves being present and engaged in the current moment. It includes being focused on what we are doing and fully absorbed in our activities.
	Planning skill	This skill involves creating a plan of action to achieve our goals. It includes breaking down larger goals into smaller steps and figuring out the most efficient way to reach them.
	Norm-value skill	This skill involves assessing whether our actions and beliefs align with our personal values and norms. It includes reflecting on our behaviour and making changes to ensure we are living in accordance with our values.
	Awareness skill	This skill involves using our senses to perceive the world around us and our own bodily sensations. It includes being mindful of our environment and our own physical and emotional state.
	Contemplation skill	This skill involves reflecting on our thoughts, feelings, and motivations in a given situation. It includes gaining perspective on our own lives and considering our place in the world.
(c) perspective taking regarding navigation in life according to the diversity of personal, cultural, and societal perspectives on life	Empathy skill	This skill involves understanding and considering other people's thoughts, feelings, and motivations in a given situation. It includes being able to see things from another person's perspective.
	System skill	This skill involves seeing the world and our lives from a broader perspective. It includes understanding how laws, regulations, institutions, and cultural discourses impact our lives and the world around us.

Another commonly-used Life Skills classification is from Danish, Forneris, Hodge and Hekes (2004, p40) research, in which Life Skills are divided into four dimensions, as follows.

1. Behavioural (communicating effectively with peers and adults).
2. Cognitive (making effective decisions).
3. Interpersonal (being assertive).
4. Intrapersonal (setting goals).

Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child identifies and describes core skills (listed below) that it considers essential to nurture in children for them to be successful as adults in managing work, family and relationships. However, it also emphasises that humans are not born with these skills, and that they can be learnt and improved on by adults.

- Planning: being able to make plans, carry them out, and set and meet goals.
- Focus: being able to concentrate on what is most important at any given time.
- Self-control: the ability to control how we respond to our emotions and stressful situations.
- Awareness: noticing people and situations around us and how we all fit into the picture.
- Flexibility: being able to adapt to changing situations.

While these three frameworks (Bertelsen, 2013, 2021; Danish et al. 2004; and Harvard University) appear to be comprehensive, the Life Skills dimensions within each are relatively high level and fail to identify specific Life Skills (e.g. numeracy, literacy) that could form the basis of a Life Skills development programme. In order to consider Life Skills in the Armed Forces, a more specific list of skills is needed. The non-academic literature provides some ideas of important Life Skills that are more specific and therefore may be more useful.

As with the academic literature, there is not an agreed set of Life Skills within the non-academic literature. An examination of the frameworks available (see below) shows that no single framework contains an exhaustive list of Life Skills, but together these can help to create a list of Life Skills that should be considered and can be compared to Robinson et al.'s (2014) framework.

Despite the lack of an agreed categorisation of Life Skills, basic Life Skills tend to be universally understood to include literacy, numeracy and an understanding of digital, finance, legal, and healthcare information. However, most researchers argue Life Skills are more complex than basic practical skills, such as managing finance and cooking meals, and also encompass psychosocial characteristics (Hodge et al., 2013). For example, the WHO describes the contents of Life Skills *"as a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others, and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner"*. They go on to say, *"Life Skills may be directed toward personal actions or actions toward others, as well as toward actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health"* (WHO, 1994, p.3) and identify five types of Life Skills across cultures:

1. decision-making and problem-solving;
2. creative thinking and critical thinking;
3. communication and interpersonal skills;
4. self-awareness and empathy; and
5. coping with emotions and stress (WHO, 1999, p.3).

The British Council website lists creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, the ability to communicate and collaborate, and personal and social responsibility, and describes these as *"essential skills for success in the 21st century, both for healthy societies and for successful and employable individuals"*.

Some of these skills, as follows, also feature in the core Life Skills identified by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2012).

- Decision-making and problem-solving.
- Creative thinking and critical thinking.
- Communication and interpersonal skills.
- Self-awareness and empathy.
- Assertiveness and equanimity.
- Resilience, coping with emotions, and coping with stress.

An Internet search using the term 'Life Skills' yielded a large number of sites that claim, sometimes without any reference to evidence, to identify essential Life Skills that everyone should have. Examples of strap lines for these sites are '10 Life Skills for adults that you should learn now', 'The 8 most important Life Skills for adults to build', and '48 Life Skills everyone should learn'. The skills listed on these sites vary enormously. For example, the Today All Day website (a 24/7 streaming channel for NBC News) lists 'Ten skills in life you need as an adult' (Pennell, 2020), with no information about how these very specific skills were identified as important. The skills are:

1. How to change a tyre.
2. How to wrap a present.

3. How to sew a button.
4. How to do first aid.
5. How to iron a shirt.
6. How to use a fire extinguisher.
7. How to unclog a toilet.
8. How to calculate a tip.
9. How to make a signature dish.
10. How to write a thank you note.

Another example is an article published on The Independent website in 2016 which, under the heading '31 Life Skills every functioning adult should master', lists a varied mixture of practical, emotional and interpersonal skills including the following.

- Accepting feedback gracefully.
- Making friends in any environment.
- Speaking a second language.
- Sticking to a budget.
- Public speaking.
- Cooking basic meals.

The article describes the list as having been compiled from an online discussion thread plus scientific research and expert opinion (Lebowitz, 2016).

From the above, it is clear that perceptions of what constitute Life Skills vary considerably and include practical activities in addition to social and emotional skills that are likely to contribute to psychological wellbeing. However, in combining these frameworks and comparing them to Robinson et al.'s (2014), it is possible to develop a more comprehensive list of the Life Skills that should be considered in relation to the Armed Forces. Before this can be achieved, however, it is important to consider the context in which this project is considering Life Skills as the nature of the Life Skills needed will be dependent on this.

3.2.2 – Context and Purpose Matters when Defining Life Skills

It is clear from both the academic and non-academic literature that context and the focal audience are important when defining Life Skills. The literature suggests that, given Life Skills are considered in the context of the interplay between an individual's agency and the surrounding context (Bertelsen, 2013), different social groups have a different understanding of what Life Skills consist of. For example, for young adults and students, the focus is to equip individuals with the Life Skills they need to enter employment and to function as independent citizens (Nasheeda, Abdullah, Krauss, & Ahmed, 2019). In this situation, Life Skills of importance include self-awareness, coping with emotions, empathy and coping with stress, effective communication, interpersonal skills, creative thinking and problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making (Pradeep et al., 2019).

The importance of context is very apparent when Life Skills programmes, which are usually (although not exclusively) aimed at young adults and/or people who are societally disadvantaged, are examined. As part of this research, several of these programmes were examined in detail. Both the content of these programmes, and the delivery mechanisms used to impart this content, vary depending on the purpose of the programme and the nature of the participants. Further information about five of these programme providers (Barclays, Barnardo's, BT, CPPE, and Novus) can be found in Section 5 where the programmes are presented as case studies.

Life Skills programmes aimed at disadvantaged young people tend to have a variety of aims around supporting participants to gain the skills they need to function effectively in society. However, the content and delivery mechanisms vary depending on the aim of the programme and the specific participant group, as the following examples illustrate.

- Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills in the North of England (see Section 5) programme aims to provide education to young people aged 16 to 19 who are unable or unwilling to participate in mainstream education. The focus is on helping young people access the world of work by equipping them with maths, English and vocational skills. Because participants typically come from disadvantaged backgrounds, their lives can be chaotic and unreliable, so the content is delivered face-to-face, and their attendance is monitored closely.

- The Marks & Start programme[5] is designed to impart employability skills to disadvantaged young people who are struggling to gain employment, although the age range is wider (16 to 30). This programme focuses directly on the skills participants would need to work at a Marks & Spencer store; the content is delivered via a face-to-face induction programme followed by four weeks of closely-supervised work experience in a store, and those who complete the programme and receive favourable assessments are offered the opportunity to work for the company.
- The BT Work Ready programme is for young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and aims to break the cycle of worklessness via an intensive 10-day course. This is delivered face-to-face and focuses on the skills needed to enhance employability. As BT is a technology company with millions of customers, it is unsurprising that the content includes building participants' digital and customer service skills. Participants who complete the programme are offered an interview with a view to working for the company.
- A Barnardo's programme called Swansea Bloom (see Section 5) has a different focus from employability. It is aimed at care leavers, who are often vulnerable and isolated when leaving the care system to live independently, due mainly to not having a supportive family network. The programme aims to develop the emotional and social skills that its participants need in order to gain confidence, build friendship networks and feel part of the community. Provision is face-to-face, often on a one-to-one basis, and includes life coaching to enhance self-awareness and set goals.

Another set of Life Skills programmes are aimed at offenders. Behan (2014) indicates that in this case Life Skills relate to equipping prisoners with the skills they need to return to civil society. These Life Skills include numeracy, literacy, managing housing, financial literacy, cognitive behaviour and mending or building social relationships. For example, the education services delivered by Novus (see Section 5), aim to give prisoners and young offenders the Life Skills that will help them turn their lives around when their sentence ends via gaining employment. For the majority of prisoners/young offenders, there is a focus on enhancing participants' basic maths, English and digital skills; a limited amount of vocational training is also offered in areas such as catering and construction. This type of provision is delivered face-to-face; however, offenders with higher levels of educational attainment and digital skills can access distance learning provided in partnership with the Open University.

By contrast, some Life Skills programmes have been developed for adults who already function effectively within society and at work, but wish to develop their self-awareness, confidence, wellbeing and practice. Examples include the following.

- Members of CPPE who are qualified pharmacists, trainee pharmacists or pharmacy technicians are offered a Life Skills course (see Section 5). This aims to enhance participants' abilities in: being a reflective practitioner; practical self-management; maintaining emotional wellbeing; working with and supporting others; and increasing personal influence. It is a structured e-course, run entirely online, consisting of eight weekly sessions of four-hour blocks; although supported by a tutor, participants are expected to engage fully with the materials and complete the course independently in their own time.
- The City Literary Institute[6], London offers a variety of fee-paying courses, badged as 'Life Skills', to adults; these have the broad aim of enhancing health and wellbeing. Topics include assertiveness, positive psychology and happiness, improving self-esteem and resilience, and enhancing interpersonal skills. They are targeted at people already in work, and are almost all delivered online during evenings or weekends.

Even for the same social group, there can be different priorities at different life/career stages. For example, in the UK Armed Forces, the Life Skills needed differ for military personnel as they enter, move through and leave their service (Robinson et al., 2014). Basic or foundation skills (e.g. basic literacy and practical understandings) are the focus for early Service leavers (those having served less than four years) in their initial employment. By contrast, later leavers have often developed these skills through training during service. Instead, complex skills such as skill transferability and adaptability are more important since they have been used to Service life and culture (Robinson et al., 2014).

The UK Armed Forces, in the Defence Holistic Transition Policy (Joint Service Publication (JSP) 100 Part 1 and Part 2 V1.1 April 2021; MOD, 2021a), include Life Skills as one of the key Pillars of Transition. One of the aims of this policy is to ensure that Life Skills are developed throughout a Service person's career in order to prepare for the transition to civilian life, rather than being considered mainly at the end of an Armed Forces career. This is considered particularly important for people leaving *"involuntarily, suddenly or unexpectedly, for whatever reason"* (para 1.1b). Although Life Skills are not formally

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[5] https://jobs.marksandspencer.com/marks-start
[6] https://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/health-wellbeing/life-skills

defined in JSP 100, Paragraph 1.7a refers to 'civilian' and 'life' issues being budgeting, debt management, housing, health, civilian agencies, individual responsibilities to plan and prepare. It is unclear how these differ from several of the other Pillars of Transition[7].

3.2.3 – Life Skills Framework

As discussed in the previous sections, Life Skills are not a single agreed set of skills but rather several partially-overlapping sets and are dependent on context. While the context and individual should be considered in any discussion of Life Skills, the team have opted to develop/use a context-free framework. In developing this framework, this research has drawn upon the framework developed by Robinson et al. (2014). This framework included three levels: foundation Life Skills; complex skills and abilities; and outcomes. Foundation skills are the building blocks for more complex skills and abilities while outcomes are those aspects that demonstrate successful and effective functioning in society. The evidence review undertaken for the current research suggests that the conceptual model proposed by Robinson et al. (2014) remains valid, with the three levels and the specific Life Skills contained in each level still relevant in more recent evidence. Specifically, the evidence review found nothing to refute the importance of the following aspects that were contained in the original model (Robinson et al., 2014).

- **Foundation skills:** basic skills (literacy, numeracy, Information Communication Technology (ICT), communications); self-awareness/self-management; and ability to manage own learning.
- **Complex skills and abilities:** negotiation and influence; interpersonal skills; self-presentation; decision-making; problem-solving; self-discipline; and planning.
- **Outcomes:** employability; citizenship; practical living (financial, health, hygiene, accommodation); social competence; resilience/adaptability; and personal growth.

However, whilst the framework remains valid, it is clear that the scope of Life Skills has been expanding with changing economic and societal demands. Specifically, the following skills and outcomes were identified in the evidence as additions to the original model.

- **Foundation skills:** financial literacy; digital literacy; managing identity disruption.
- **Complex skills and abilities:** adaptive communication; cognitive-behavioural skills; goal-setting skills; work-life balancing skills; coping skills; networking skills; critical thinking/innovative thinking; and emotional intelligence.
- **Outcomes:** wellbeing and entrepreneurship.

These skills were found to be important in enhancing an individual's self-efficacy and performance from multiple emerging research findings that are inclusive of, but not exclusive to, the military context. Each is discussed in turn below.

3.2.3.1 – Foundation Skills

- **Financial literacy:** OECD (2014) defines financial literacy as the *"knowledge and understanding of financial concepts and risks, and the skills, motivation and confidence to apply such knowledge and understanding in order to make effective decisions across a range of financial contexts, to improve the financial well-being of individuals and society, and to enable participation in economic life"* (p. 43). In the context of the Armed Forces, a study conducted by Kantar Futures (2013) showed that some ex-Service personnel and their families are exposed to financial instability when transitioning to civilian life and that the Armed Forces lifestyle can leave some financially unprepared for civilian life. The inclusion of financial literacy in the Life Skills model is an important first step in raising awareness of developing financial literacy.
- **Digital literacy:** Defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to use digital technologies, this Life Skill has increased in importance due to the huge rise in the availability and use of digital technology. Research has suggested that Service personnel at every rank use ICT and social media daily. Digital literacy affects the way they live, work and communicate (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Meanwhile, Service personnel could also be targeted by, or engage with, the viral spread of false information online (Singer & Johnson, 2022). The resulting effects on the military have an impact on operational security, force reputation, and even the physical health of Service personnel (Singer & Johnson, 2022). Possessing digital literacy decreases the risk related to cyber

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[7] JSP 100 recognises the broad and varied reach of transition and the relative ways in which individual Service Personnel and their families will be affected by each depending on their individual circumstances. Transition includes consideration of the following pillars: a. Health (physical and mental); b. Accommodation; c. Finance (including pensions, debt management and budgeting); d. Education; e. Serving Well (Life Skills); and f. Leaving Well.

security for military personnel and the Armed Forces as a whole. When transitioning to civilian society, without adequate digital literacy, Service leavers find it difficult to participate in the economy and labour market, particularly given the digital transformation that the world of work is experiencing (Singer & Johnson, 2022). In the UK, the MOD (2021b) has set out a Digital Strategy that outlines a vision for where digital within Defence needs to be by 2030; this includes developing digital awareness among the Department's senior leadership, and digital skills across its workforce (MOD, 2021b).This demonstrates that the MOD also ascribes importance to the development of digital.

- **Managing identity disruption:** This Life Skill relates to self-awareness and self-management. For Service personnel transitioning to civilian life, experiencing identity shock is not unusual. As Higate (2003) alluded, the formation of a military identity, with aspects such as command and control and a well-defined hierarchy, might carry strong implications for individuals' cognitive behaviours in their civilian life. However, the civilian society and workplace do not necessarily need and value such military identities. As such, a sense of disorientation can occur, leading to difficulties in navigating the individual's previously familiar civilian environment (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper, & Fossey, 2018).

3.2.3.2 – Complex Skills and Abilities

The Life Skills framework proposed by Robinson et al. (2014) suggests that foundation skills work as building blocks for fostering complex skills. This is further supported by Ashtiani, Afzali, Ebadi and Hassanabadi (2018) who argue that the military is a highly stressful and complex area in which to work and recommend setting up a Life Skills inventory, a set of complex skills that provide the context for positive adaptive coping and enable the individual to accept his social responsibilities and face everyday problems and expectations. The five more complex skills recommended by Ashtiani et al. (2018) include the following.

- **Adaptive communication** is a form of communication tailored for a specific situation or person. It is necessary for two reasons: either to address specific needs; or to suit the given context. Both reasons could frequently appear for Service personnel. Specific needs for adaptive communication may arise out of situations in which personnel leave their service and are re-employed in a civilian setting. Differing military and civilian contexts require Service personnel to possess different communication approaches (Pradeep et al., 2019).

- **Cognitive-behaviour skills**, such as problem-solving skills, are considered to be important Life Skills, given their positive effects. Ashtiani et al. (2018) summarised research on the effect of cognitive-behaviour skills in improving individual attitudes, mood in addicts and mental health, and decreasing depression. Additionally, cognitive-behavioural training is effective in reducing the fear of public speaking.

- **Goal-setting** has been found to be effective in enhancing an individual's self-efficacy and performance, as achieving set goals can lead to feelings of competence and capability, thereby increasing one's sense of self-efficacy. Travers, Bohnert and Randall's (2013) research found that there is a significant correlation between goal-setting and variables such as life satisfaction, vitality and negative emotions. No evidence relating to goal-setting within the Armed Forces was found.

- **Family-work balancing skills** enable individuals to effectively manage their personal and work responsibilities, leading to a better quality of life. This involves establishing priorities and boundaries between work and life, making deliberate choices to allocate time and energy between work and personal life in a way that feels fulfilling and sustainable (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Achieving work-life balance requires a range of skills, including time management, communication, and self-care. These skills can have a positive impact not only on individuals' careers but also on their personal relationships and overall wellbeing. Cross-cultural work-life balance research concluded that, by cultivating work-life balance, individuals can reduce stress, increase their job satisfaction, and improve their physical and mental health (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014).

- **Coping skills**, i.e. cognitive and behavioural strategies used to reduce stress and pressure, are much needed in the Armed Forces community due to the stress, pressure and complexity of military jobs (Ashtiani et al., 2018). Researchers have found that coping skills such as positive self-talk, generating self-hope, and pretending to be calm can effectively reduce anxiety in general and military-related stressors (Ashtiani et al., 2018; Kees & Rosenblum, 2015).

In addition to the Life Skills described above, three other Life Skills have been identified as important in the recent literature, as follows.

- **Networking** comprises personal communication, relationship management and professionalism, as a means of building connections with others to help an individual's employment, career development, and life resettlement. Networking skills help people build appropriate support networks and stay connected to the military and civilian society. Wang, Bamber, Flynn, and McCormack (2022) suggest that Other Ranks have less access to informal (e.g. social networks) transition support resources compared to Officers. Without good networks, Other Ranks have fewer opportunities to approach others for professional development and successful career transition. Developing networks often accompanies the building of emotional stability and social skills (Steptoe & Jackson, 2020).

- **Emotional intelligence** is the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, and manage them effectively, which influences decision-making and social judgment in every aspect of life. As a complex skill, it can be broken down into the five components of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2001). It has been found to be a predictor of Life Skills, a vital part of Life Skills development (Bastian, Burns, & Nettelbeck, 2005) and an outcome of Life Skills training. In the military context, research has evidenced that emotional intelligence training improves and moderates the soldier's capacity to adapt to and manage stress and traumatic experiences. It also improves their career development, job fulfilment and the successful integration of veterans into civilian life (Garcia-Zea, Sankar, & Isna, 2019).

- **Critical and innovative thinking** are both highlighted as part of Life Skills in the civilian setting and in military service (WHO, 1999; Rönnlund, Ledman, Nylund, & Rosvall, 2019). These skills include the component skills of analysing arguments 'out of the box', making inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, judging or evaluating, and thus linking to well-informed decision-making and problem-solving. Competence in critical and innovative thinking enables individuals to effectively evaluate the current conditions facing them, and hence increase participation in arenas (e.g. political, community, and work settings) that set conditions for everyday life.

3.2.3.3 – Outcomes

The literature also suggests the following two Life Skills outputs as worthy of consideration for adding to the model.

- **Wellbeing.** Life Skills overall are claimed as a solid foundation for healthy wellbeing. A number of studies in children, adolescents and those in Higher Education found that Life Skills play a key role in promoting educational and occupational success in early life. Acquiring Life Skills gives young adults and students inner confidence and enables them to relate effectively with others, cope with disappointment and stressful situations, proficiently solve problems, celebrate life's successes, and make responsible and healthful decisions (Nasheeda et al., 2019). There are similar benefits for wellbeing for the elderly. Steptoe and Wardle (2017) conducted a longitudinal study on the impact of Life Skills for over 8,000 men and women aged 52 and older in the UK. They found that people who have better Life Skills enjoy a range of benefits including greater wellbeing, financial stability, less depression, low social isolation, better health and fewer chronic diseases. Therefore, it is suggested that fostering and maintaining these skills in adult life may be relevant to health and wellbeing at older ages. In the military context, there is a lack of studies to unpack the association between Life Skills and wellbeing for serving personnel. It is worth noting that research suggests that many US veterans do not possess the necessary skills or engage in behaviours that actually do improve their wellbeing, which leads to continued poor mental health, high risk-taking behaviours and high risk for suicides (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). This raises up an urgent call for research and implications about developing Life Skills for wellbeing in military settings.

- **Entrepreneurship** is seen as a potential part of the development and outcomes of Life Skills. It is commonly defined as *"activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods or services, ways of organizing markets, processes, and/or raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed"* (Shane, 2003, p. 4). Some studies pay attention to military personnel selecting entrepreneurship as a means of making a living and career after their service. Hope, Oh and Mackin (2011) note that military veterans have a higher rate (at least 45%) of self-employment compared with those who have not been in the military. It has been suggested that military service can lead to the choice of entrepreneurship in transitioning to civilian society because the Armed Forces develop personnel with complex skills such as leadership, problem-solving, risk-taking propensity, solidarity and teamwork (Avrahami & Lerner, 2003). The development and improvement of these skills may contribute to the increasing number of 'Vetrepreneurs', who are veterans leaving the military and starting up a business of their own (McDermott, Boyd, & Weaver, 2015).

With the above findings in mind, the revised Life Skills Framework can be seen in Figure 3-1.
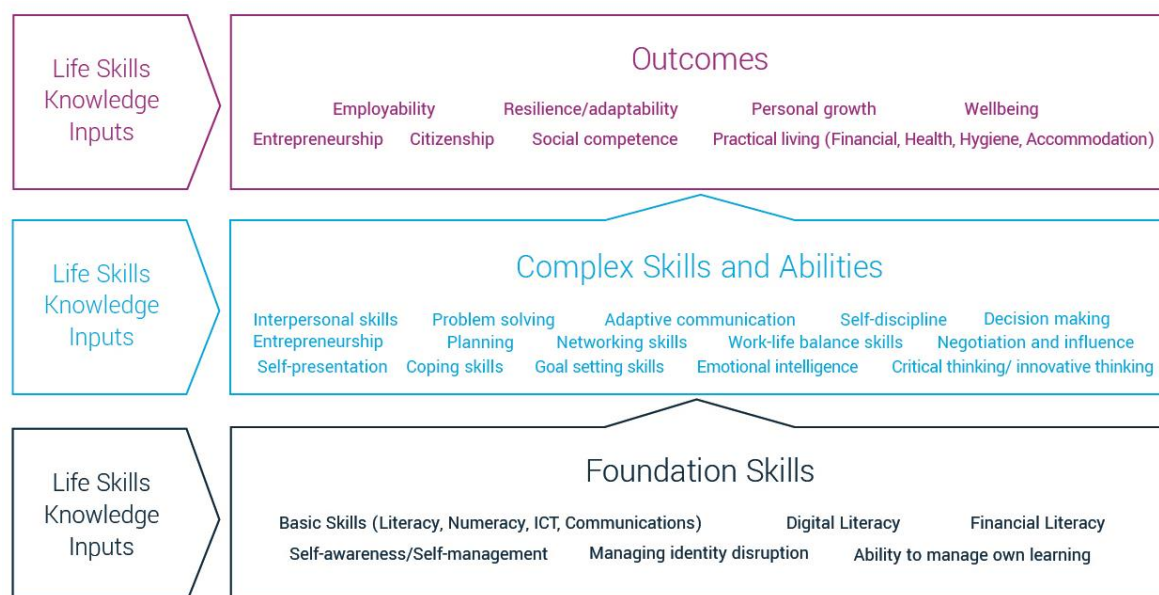
Figure 3-1: Life Skills Framework

3.3 − Available Support for Life Skills Development and Transition

This next section examines the evidence relating to the existing available support for Life Skills development, to identify the available training programmes, resources and support to develop Life Skills in the context of the Armed Forces. This approach considers the earlier argument that context matters when defining the concept of Life Skills: different stages, such as serving in, and leaving, the Armed Forces might need different types of Life Skills support.

3.3.1 − Available Life Skills Support in the UK Armed Forces

Life Skills and their development are highly valued in the UK Armed Forces. Human capability is a key Defence strategic requirement and is relevant not only to ensure that Armed Forces personnel are equipped with the knowledge, skills and experience to fulfil their obligation while in service, but also to provide a smooth and effective transition to civilian life (MOD, 2021a).

Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces include development of basic literacy and numeracy skills driven by national policy. A longitudinal study by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS, 2012) to assess the impact of literacy and numeracy skills and related interventions on personal and professional development and operational effectiveness showed that the Armed Forces are strongly committed to developing basic skills, especially for young recruits and junior ranks. The report also suggested that the organisational context and culture greatly influence the design, management and delivery of the provision and support of these skills. For example, investing in literacy and numeracy improvements requires senior management endorsement. However, the research showed that line managers may be hesitant to allow their personnel to access such support during work time if the development policy and provision are not sensitive to the operational setting. Additionally, personnel may be less motivated to participate in a programme that they perceive as not directly relevant to their work and career goals (BIS, 2012).

Life Skills support for military personnel depends on their career stage as they enter, progress through, and leave their service. For those currently serving, Life Skills training is provided through apprenticeship and programmes such as 'Command and Staff Training' and 'Officer Career Development' at Armed Forces training units and education centres. Service leavers receive a resettlement package through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and further development of Life Skills as part of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy. As it states in JSP 100, the support covers a range of life-changing issues that affect both Service personnel and their families, from basic needs such as registering with a doctor or dentist to more complex needs such as finding suitable employment and maintaining good mental health (MOD, 2021a).

The work by Robinson et al. (2014) included an audit of the Life Skills provision for each of the three single Services. It identified the Life Skills provision across the following stages of a Service career: early career (including Phase One and Phase Two training); mid-career 'elective' training and education; mid-career 'mandatory' training and education (e.g. training required for promotion); and late career and resettlement training and education.

- The focus of Life Skills education at early career stage was to prepare personnel for their Armed Forces career and was mostly delivered within a short period of time during Phase One training.
- Mid-career provision of mandatory Life Skills training was mainly focused on developing complex skills and abilities (e.g. problem-solving and decision-making) needed by Service personnel to develop their command and leadership competences. Due to the linking of this type of training to rank, it was available only to those promoted, or about to be promoted, to a particular rank. Elective education was also available and was often accessed later in Service personnels' Armed Forces careers to enhance their employability when preparing to move to civilian life.
- Late career stage Life Skills learning was largely delivered through the resettlement process and focused mainly on employability and practical living. It was tailored to the needs of the individual, but the report pointed out that those with fewer than six years' service received less support, and those with fewer than four years' service receive the least.

Robinson et al. (2014) noted that the system in place when the audit was undertaken meant that those who entered with the lowest level of Life Skills, and left early (i.e. those probably in most need of Life Skills development), were likely to leave having had fewer opportunities to gain the skills needed for functioning effectively in the civilian world than longer-serving personnel. Robinson et al. (2014) also identified some gaps in the provision of Life Skills development. The main gap was the need for better management of own learning currently, and ability to manage own career progression and development in the future; very little formal support was given to Service personnel to encourage them to extend their own knowledge, skills and abilities in the area of Life Skills. Qualitative gaps were also identified in terms of how Life Skills training was delivered, to whom it was provided and when. Firstly, training was usually delivered using a 'one size fits all' approach, at times when personnel were a 'captive audience' (e.g. during Phase One training), rather than taking account of individual needs. Secondly, those who served for shorter periods, or who were less successful in their careers, tended to receive insufficient input, because the system rewarded length of service and career progression. Thirdly, during the mid-career period (between Phase One training and resettlement), personnel were largely responsible for identifying development opportunities themselves, which was not always straightforward; this meant that more highly-motivated individuals were likely to receive more input than others.

The exact nature of Life Skills provision in the UK Armed Forces at present is unclear, as there is no evidence of a more recent audit having been undertaken. However, it is clear that the MOD delineate training, education and skills from Life Skills. Life Skills encompasses providing guidance and signposting to required support. The single Services are responsible for delivering Life Skills support whilst personnel are in Service, meaning that approach can vary between them. However, a common approach on leaving is evident. The MOD has a Service Leavers' Guide (MOD, 2020) for those thinking about, and in the process of, transitioning to civilian life. This contains a Service leavers' timeline and information and advice under the following headings: the discharge process; resettlement, jobs and housing; pay, pensions and other benefits; other sources of help – state and Service charities; and your Reserve liability, responsibilities and opportunities. The guide contains a considerable amount of useful information, although its focus is on those aiming to leave within the next six to nine months, suggesting that some personnel may need to absorb a lot of material in a relatively short and busy period. However, it should be noted that this guide is in the process of being 'rebranded' into a through-career handrail for Service, including Life Skills advice, information and guidance. Its introduction will embed transition as a cradle to grave process, giving all serving personnel and their families the ability to identify gaps in knowledge and seek further information on key Life Skills topics throughout their career and alleviating the potential for too much information, too late, and not enough time to absorb it.

The Army provides further guidance, in the form of 17 'Transition to Civilian Life' information sheets[8] available to download, each of which covers a specific topic; some of these are relevant to Service leavers generally, others to certain groups. The information sheet topics, which comprise a mix of practical and emotional/psychological aspects, are shown below. It should be noted that the rebranded Service Leavers Guide will further enhance and complement the below information but by utilising links to gov.uk readily-available information (money-helper, Department for Work and Pensions, etc.) rather than information leaflets that require constant reviewing and updating.

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[8] https://www.army.mod.uk/people/leaving-well/service-leavers-veterans/transition-to-civilian-life/

1. How it works for you; local authority information.
2. The emotional pathway.
3. National healthcare information and guidance.
4. Managing personal finances.
5. Immigration information (for non-UK Service personnel and UK Service personnel with relatives not from the UK).
6. HARDFACTS[9] monitoring and assessment tools. HARDFACTS is a management tool that provides a checklist of factors, each supported by a list of questions, which if used regularly and honestly throughout a serving person's military career will monitor their commitment to their Personal Development and Life Skills. It should be noted that HARDFACTS is being developed as a digitalised tool with two variants, one for through-career assessment and one for preparation for leaving the Services. This, in conjunction with the rebranded Service Leavers Guide, will give a mechanism to identify gaps in knowledge and signpost to where those gaps can be filled.
7. Planning guide to secure private accommodation.
8. Assistance with house purchase.
9. Qualities, skills, competences, achievements (required by civilian employers).
10. Resilience and wellbeing (for Service personnel and their families).
11. Pensions.
12. The Armed Forces Covenant.
13. Joining the Forces Credit Union.
14. Gambling.
15. Thinking of leaving the Army.
16. Preventative welfare guidance.
17. The transition newsletter.

The 17 information sheets contain a considerable amount of information, guidance and advice. However, accessing and reading these is down to the individual, meaning that some Service personnel, perhaps those who might benefit most, may not do so. In addition, an individual's ability to make use of this information is likely to be dependent on how good their foundation Life Skills are (i.e. a serving person who is not particularly literate or numerate is probably less likely and able to make the most out of these resources). Further to the above, the information sheets are positioned as guidance for Service leavers, but some (for example 9, 10 and 14) could be useful for Service personnel and their families through their Armed Forces career.

3.3.2 – The US Armed Forces

The US Armed Forces provide a range of Life Skills training and support. This includes a Transition Assistance Program and service provision for education, training, employment, and finance are applied to their Service members and spouses. The Transition Assistance Program (Kamarck, 2018) is a comprehensive programme designed to assist Service members in their transition from military to civilian life particularly in terms of employment. The Transition Assistance Program includes a variety of components, such as military skills transition training, financial planning, benefits briefings and an employment workshop which includes learning job search, resume writing and interview skills. These outcomes will be reflected in the development of an individual transition plan review. This is mandated by law and is intended to provide Service members with the information, tools and resources they need to be successfully 'career ready' when they leave service (Keeling, Ozuna, Kintzle & Castro, 2019).

Given that the 'social rules' are different in military environments compared to civilian ones (Cooper et al., 2018), one of the barriers veterans transitioning to civilian life might face is adapting to civilian culture and approaches. Research suggests that veterans may overcome this barrier by connecting with other veterans, using available social support and support services (Keeling et al., 2019). Nevertheless, Carroll, Orthner, Behnke, Smith, Day and Raburn (2013) argue that skills training involving managing finances and legal matters, garnering social support, and accessing community resources are often not accessible to personnel and families in the National Guard and Military Reserves.

A search of the non-academic literature found some information about Life Skills training for Reservist and National Guard families, provided via a post written by members of the OneOp Family Development team, which is described as aiming to support the development of professionals working with military families (Morse & Radunovich, 2015). The training in Life Skills, defined as managing money, legal challenges, social support, and community resources, is delivered via four

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[9] HARDFACTS is a mnemonic made up from a simple checklist of factors that cover: Health and Stress: Accommodation; Relocation; Drugs and Alcohol; Finance; Attitude; Children and Family; Training; and Support Agencies. See: (https://www.army.mod.uk/umbraco/Surface/Download/Get/15973)

workshops to military families (typically couples although also open to single people). A qualitative evaluation indicated that participants particularly appreciated gaining a better understanding of how military stress impacts the couple relationship, and the role of communication in strengthening the relationship.

A further finding was a company that offers Life Skills education for Service members and their families[10], using a 'train the trainers' approach; in this context, the 'trainers' appear to be military personnel. However, the definition of Life Skills is very narrow, with the courses and sessions being entirely focused on financial management. Examples include budgeting, investing, how to choose and use a credit card, how to buy a car, and how to use your bonus.

3.3.3 – Canadian Armed Forces

In the Canadian Armed Forces, Life Skills are defined as being financially prepared, relocating, finding a healthcare provider, understanding Veteran Affairs Canada services and benefits, managing military identity loss, networking, finding employment and identifying educational opportunities for personnel and their spouses. The development and improvement of these are partly covered by the Canadian Forces Professional Development System during service, with four pillars: education; training; employment experience; and self-development. Whilst the professional development of these areas is strongly encouraged and seen as highly beneficial for military personnel's growth and career progression, it is not mandatory in all cases. Specific development requirements and opportunities vary depending on an individual's rank, occupation, career path, and the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces. For some roles or career advancements, certain educational or training qualifications may be mandatory[11].

For personnel leaving, there is a Veteran Affairs Canada programme for veterans and their families: supporting families and wellbeing; investing in education and training; ensuring financial security; facilitating access to healthcare; promoting mental health; and focusing on rehabilitation. Lee, Thompson, Skomorovsky and Dursun's (2022) research indicates the usefulness of having a self-assessment tool to help leavers reflect on their preparedness for the military to civilian transition and need for assistance. This tool covers dimensions such as motivations for employment or other meaningful activity, finances, health, Life Skills and preparedness, social integration, and housing/physical environment. This self-assessment tool is argued to hold promise for encouraging transitioning members and families to seek assistance as a complement to the Veteran Affairs Canada programme.

3.3.4 – Australian Armed Forces

The focus of the support provided by the Australian Armed Forces lies in financial literacy, resilience, and employability during service. Leaving personnel are provided with the Career Transition Assistance Scheme including: education and training; career advice; resume coaching and financial counselling; Self-Management and Resilience Training ('BattleSMART') and mental health awareness training (Keep Your Mates Safe); as well as a series of group programmes dedicated to supporting their family (FamilySMART). Personnel and their families are informed of these via transition centres.

3.3.5 – Life Skills Support for Specific Groups in the Armed Forces

Some research has suggested that specific groups within the Armed Forces or veteran population need particular Life Skills development in certain contexts (e.g. Kay, Sutton, Margerison, & McKenna, 2022; Keeling, Borah, Kintzle, Kleykamp, & Robertson, 2020). Certain groups of military personnel may require specialised support in developing Life Skills, given that they are identified as being at risk of facing unique challenges and barriers during their Life Skills development and transition to civilian life, compared to the general population. These groups include wounded, injured and sick personnel, veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), homeless veterans, and spouses/partners of serving personnel. These challenges can range from difficulty in finding employment, to mental health issues, to a lack of social support networks. As a result a number of these groups are already provided with tailored Life Skills development.

- **Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS) personnel.** Multi Activity Courses provided at Royal British Legion's Battle Back Centre are for WIS personnel. Multi Activity Courses are five-day residential support courses, based on adaptive sport and adventure training, designed to provide a context for personal growth, development, and recovery support. This is coupled with health coaching with the same staff throughout the five days. Multi Activity Courses were developed in 2010 with over 4,500 participants by March 2020. Studies have shown that these recovery

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[10] Life Skills for Soldiers
[11] Canadian Government Website. (2023). Canadian Forces Professional Development System.

courses facilitate positive and widespread changes in how participants describe themselves and their lives, hence engendering increased cognitive flexibility, resilience, and behavioural adaptability (Carless, 2014; Carless, Sparkes, Douglas & Cooke, 2014; Kay et al., 2022). Almost half of the participants said this positive impact lasted six months after the courses ended (Kay et al., 2022).

- **Veterans with PTSD.** In addition to general Life Skills interventions, such as problem-solving strategies and social skills, some studies have found that specific support such as occupational therapy interventions, remedial Life Skills classes, stress management (mindfulness-based stress reduction, relaxation exercises), and resilience training, were helpful to enhance the Life Skills development for veterans with PTSD (Baumann, Baker & Elshaug, 2018; Judkins & Bradley, 2017; Gregg, Kitzman & Shordike, 2016; Smith-Forbes, Quick, & Brown, 2016).
- **Homeless veterans.** A group of US researchers (Gao, Dolce, Rio, Heitzmann, & Loving, 2016) evaluated a goal-oriented, time-limited coaching approach for skills building in Homeless Veteran Supported Employment programmes in the US. The coaching/training approach is hands-on, focusing on direct coaching or side-by-side instruction with Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists in the community who are interacting with veterans and potential employers. The study found that coaching could improve homeless veterans' job development skills with a focus on supporting employment outcomes.
- **Spouses/partners of serving personnel.** Additional support for spouses and partners of serving personnel has been provided in both the UK and US. By providing practical, emotional and often financial support, veterans' spouses play an important role in the successful transition to civilian life (Sondergaard et al., 2016). The UK MOD launched the Spouse Employment Support Trial in 2015 to help spouses optimise their access to employment and to help them find better employment at a level that is commensurate with their skills, knowledge and experience and/or in accord with their aspirations and ability. Spouse Employment Support mainly includes two components: job readiness; and career support (similar provision to the support that UK Service leavers receive from CTP when exiting the military). Training grants of up to £879 are available for spouses to pursue training and skills-based qualifications in their chosen field of employment. More recently, the UK Armed Forces established an ambitious new family strategy (2022-23) to acknowledge the importance of serving personnel's families and to offer support and care at all stages.

Likewise, the US Armed Forces highlight that Life Skills support available to personnel should also apply to their spouse/partner, including Transition Assistance Program employment training and job-seeking preparation training, peer support, transportation and other support such as childcare (Keeling et al., 2020). The US Armed Forces in particular provide a specific community-based intervention for military spouses: HomeFront Strong, the content of which is below in Table 3-2. Kees and Rosenblum (2015) conducted research to evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of HomeFront Strong and generated preliminary efficacy data regarding its impacts on psychological health and adjustment. Findings support the feasibility of the intervention and high rates of programme satisfaction. Participants reported learning new strategies and feeling more knowledgeable in their ability to use effective coping skills for managing deployment and military-related stressors. Participation in HomeFront Strong was also associated with a reduction in levels of anxiety and perceived stress, and improvements in life satisfaction and life engagement. It was concluded that HomeFront Strong is a promising community-based intervention for military spouses that is designed to enhance resilience, reduce negative psychological health symptoms, and improve coping competence.

Table 3-2: HomeFront Strong Curriculum

Session	Title	Main content
1	Foster Resilience	Resilience and gratitude Normalization of military experience Introduce personal narrative Introduce Workbook
2	Manage Stress	Individual styles of stress management Psycho-education on stress physiology Stress Level Rating Scale Breathing techniques
3	Cultivate Optimism	Building positive coping skills Cognitive loop Optimism, pessimism, and realism Affirmations, mantras, and mottos

4	Re-Think Thinking (1)	Thinking Strategies of dispute and discover Re-authoring one's personal narrative Progressive muscle relaxation
5	Re-Think Thinking (2)	Cognitive flexibility and perspective Distraction techniques Thought swapping Visualization
6	Build Community	Being a friend Types of social support "Job openings" and expectations Guided imagery
7	Allow Emotions	Observe, experiences and allow feelings Acceptance Mindfulness techniques
8	Stay Strong	Lessons learned Re-define resilience Wishes for the future

3.3.6 – The Outcomes of Life Skills Development and Transition Programmes

The multiple definitions of Life Skills limit the ability to make accurate comparisons about the relative effectiveness of Life Skills training programmes. If each Life Skills training programme targets a particular set of Life Skills, then meaningful comparisons and any consensus about the relative effectiveness of such programmes become problematic. This also explains why there is a lack of empirical research examining skill development as an outcome of specific Life Skills training. Considering this, Hodge et al. (2013) propose a comprehensive conceptual framework of Life Skills development that seeks to identify and articulate the key underlying psychological mechanisms that underpin optimal human functioning and positive psychosocial development, and therefore provides a framework by which to assess the effects of a Life Skills programme.

In Hodge et al.'s (2013) Life Skills development framework, the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness discussed in Basic Needs Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and the needs-supportive motivational climate (see Figure 3-2) are the key needs and resources that Life Skills programmes should consider in their design and delivery. When these three needs are satisfied, people experience positive psychological development and optimal psychological wellbeing, the most commonly stated outcomes of Life Skills development programmes. Moreover, the more that an individual internalises these three basic needs, the more likely they are to develop the ability to generalise Life Skills to other contexts (e.g. from school to work, from military service to civilian society). This would reinforce the value of Life Skills for individuals and lead to the application of more Life Skills expected behaviours to broader life contexts.
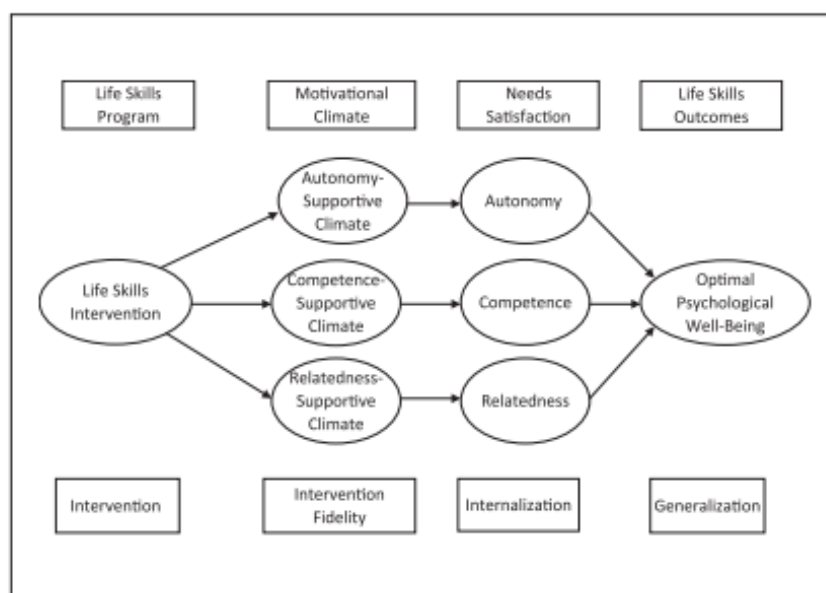
Figure 3-2: Hypothesised Conceptual Model of Life Skills Development (Hodge et al., 2013)

These key underlying psychological mechanisms could be moderated by a number of individual psychosocial factors for serving personnel in military service. Bowes, Ferreira and Henderson (2018) found that veteran adjustment difficulty and quality of life in transition were significantly correlated to mental health, experiential avoidance and cognitive reappraisal.

3.4 – The Impact of Life Skills on Transitioning out of the Armed Forces

This final section examines the impact of Life Skills on the transition of Service personnel out of the Armed Forces. Transition has been defined as the period of reintegration into civilian life from the military and encapsulates the process of change that a Service person necessarily undertakes when her or his military career comes to an end (FiMT, 2013). Understanding the role of Life Skills in this critical period of reintegration enables better understanding of the importance of providing comprehensive support for the development of Life Skills for all personnel during their life-long career and for their spouses/partners.

3.4.1 – Impact of Life Skills on the Transition of Service Personnel

Although research (e.g. Robinson et al., 2014) and JSP 100 have highlighted the importance of Life Skills in the transition process, the impact of Life Skills on transitioning out of the Armed Forces is not well understood. This could be because transitioning from the military to civilian life is a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by numerous individual and contextual factors. Pinpointing the specific impact of Life Skills in this transition can be challenging, as it requires careful examination of various variables and their interplay (Bertelsen, 2013). As a result, research on Life Skills and their effects on transitioning veterans is relatively scarce or fragmented and only a few attempts (see below) have been made to delve into the association between the development of particular Life Skills and the outcomes of the personnel's transition.

- **Coping skills and adaptability** are argued to be significant skills in determining the transition experience. Castro et al. (2015) developed Military Transition Theory to explain the US veterans', and their spouses', transition trajectories. The theory identifies three interacting and overlapping components that can be applied to understand how veterans and their spouses navigate the transition to civilian life as shown below in Table 3-3. They argue that the success/failure of transitions can be attributed to complex factors, which require the Service members to cope and adapt to a wide range of situations in transition trajectories.

Table 3-3: Military Transition Theory

	Components	Factors
Three interacting and overlapping components	"Approaching the military transition"	Factors considered important in shaping the base of the transition trajectory (e.g. military/cultural factors; the nature of the transition; and personal characteristics)
	"Managing the transition"	Factors experienced post-discharge such that they affect transition progression from service member to civilian (e.g. individual factors; social support; community civilian transition support; and military transition management)
	"Assessing the transition"	The outcomes associated with transition (e.g. work; family; health; general wellbeing, and community)

- Emerging studies indicate that **self-awareness** in identity shift is fundamental in successful transitioning. Cooper et al. (2018) argue that structural values in the UK Armed Forces leave their legacy, be it good or bad, on veterans. If the dominant, masculine characteristics that are inherent in military personnel are not re-evaluated and modified to fit civilian life, individuals undergoing the transition may experience a sense of disorientation, which can make it challenging to navigate their new environment. Therefore, veterans need to recognise that the discharge process may require a significant shift in identity in order to allow the cultural adaptation from military to civilian society (Cooper et al., 2018; Pedlar, Thompson, & Castro, 2019).
- Personal attributes such as **self-determination** affect personnel's transitioning experience. Keeling et al., (2019) conducted four focus groups with employed and unemployed Gulf War II veterans, identifying the veterans' experiences of employment barriers and facilitators. This study indicates that preparation and awareness in the pre-transition lead to divergent experiences of veterans. Individuals who are determined to be employed plan ahead mentally and strategically for their resettlement, leading to a more positive experience of the employment transition. A similar logic goes to the overall transitioning process. The self-determination would drive individual's Life Skills preparedness thus increasing the possibility of a successful transition (Pedlar et al, 2019).
- **Networking skills** could be the key skills that help with transitioning out of the Armed Forces into civilian life for serving personnel's spouses/partners. Gribble, Goodwin, Oram, and Fear (2019) conducted research with 19 spouses of British Army and RAF personnel and concluded that spouses who are unable to build connections within the military community may be at greater risk of certain outcomes in their daily life such as social isolation, stress, psychological distress and mental health problems. Spouses who have worked in civilian society may be better able to mitigate those negative impacts of accompanied postings through the development of new networks, which potentially improve their wellbeing and career transition.
- Personal attributes such as **self-confidence** affect spouses' career transition. On the one hand, due to ongoing challenges with un- and under-employment, some US military spouses may have made the choice to reduce or even give up their career aspirations. As a result, they might have opted out of the civilian labour market, only undertaking volunteering and/or home caring duties (Keeling et al., 2020). On the other, in the UK Armed Forces study, frequent relocation and issues around childcare could increase spouses' anxiety and uncertainty, which affect their confidence in their skillset (Gribble et al., 2019). Therefore, Godier-McBard, Caddick, and Fossey (2020) emphasise the necessity of re-establishing the spouses' and partners' self-confidence and enabling them to feel valued and invested to find employment and pursue career development.

3.4.2 – Assessing the Effectiveness of Life Skills Provision

There is very little in the academic or non-academic literature about how the effectiveness of Life Skills courses and programmes are assessed. The most common examples are success stories of the impact of the course/programme on participants, such as individuals 'turning their lives around'; this is usually by acquiring the skills to facilitate them gaining employment, which then enables them to find accommodation and live independently. Examples are found on some of the websites of the Life Skills programmes described above, notably Novus and Marks & Start. Aside from these success stories, publicly-available information about how these programmes are evaluated is very rare. An exception is the Barclays LifeSkills programme, which has published some of the findings of an independent evaluation carried out in 2015, together with some of the company's own statistics about the number of participants and schools signed up to the programme (see Section 5).

Within the Armed Forces, Robinson et al.'s (2014) report concluded that the quality of Life Skills provision was difficult to assess because often the training provided was not formally evaluated; the main exception to this was in the area of functional skills, where there was a pass/fail assessment of skill acquisition. It appears that things might change in the future, however, as JSP 100 states that monitoring and assessment tools will be developed that will help serving personnel, their families, the Chain of Command, and relevant unit staff, to assess how well individuals are progressing with their acquisition of Life Skills. This will include tools to track progress against milestones, allowing conversations and other interventions to take place, if necessary, especially as Service personnel approach discharge. Until these tools are made available, however, it remains the responsibility of the Chain of Command and the units to assist their personnel with personal, wellbeing and family issues.

3.5 – Summary

In summary, the concept of Life Skills is widely acknowledged as essential in enabling individuals to navigate their everyday lives effectively. These skills are multifaceted and encompass knowledge, values, attitudes, and competencies that are essential for personal development, lifelong learning, and success in various domains, such as education, employment, and social and civic life. However, there lacks a single definition of Life Skills as these skills are context-dependent and can vary widely.

Having reviewed the literature, this research suggests adopting the broad and context-free definition proposed by Robinson et al. (2014) that defines Life Skills as *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes"* (p.2). This definition is broad and comprehensive therefore allowing it to be used across multiple contexts, as well as providing a useful summation of other published definitions. Life Skills comprise both foundational skills and complex skills and abilities, which are essential building blocks for achieving positive outcomes. Knowledge inputs play a crucial role in enabling individuals to acquire foundational and complex skills and achieve desired outcomes. As the scope of Life Skills has developed over time to include skills and outcomes that are increasingly critical in today's changing economic and societal demands, this study identifies and proposes additional content to the Robinson et al. (2014) Life Skills framework.

Exploring Life Skills in the UK Armed Forces and other nations confirms the importance of context in defining Life Skills as different countries and career stages require different types of support. For example, apprenticeships and programmes are available to those currently serving, while Service leavers receive a resettlement package and Life Skills support as part of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy in the UK Armed Forces. However, there appear to be gaps in the provision of Life Skills development, such as a lack of formal support to encourage personnel to extend their knowledge, skills, and abilities in Life Skills. There are also qualitative gaps in how Life Skills training is delivered, who receives it, and when, and those who leave early with the lowest level of Life Skills receive the least support.

Veterans and their related populations, such as WIS personnel, veterans with PTSD, homeless veterans, and spouses/partners of serving personnel, may require specialised support in developing Life Skills. These groups are identified as being at risk of facing unique challenges and barriers ranging from difficulty in finding employment, to mental health issues, to a lack of social support networks. Tailored Life Skills interventions, such as the Multi Activity Course for WIS personnel and coaching for skills building in Homeless Veteran Supported Employment programmes in the US Armed Forces, can help them successfully reintegrate into civilian life.

Regarding the effectiveness of Life Skills training programmes, a comprehensive framework of Life Skills development proposed by Hodge et al. (2013) considers the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the needs-supportive motivational climate. When these needs are met, individuals experience positive psychological development and optimal wellbeing, which are the common outcomes of Life Skills development programmes. Internalisation of these needs leads to the ability to apply Life Skills in other contexts. Whilst the framework is identified as plausible, the multiple definitions of Life Skills limit the ability to make comparisons about the relative effectiveness of Life Skills training programmes.

While several Life Skills have been proposed as essential in the process of reintegration into civilian life from the military, their association with transition outcomes is not well understood in either the academic and non-academic literature. This section identified that coping skills, adaptability, self-awareness in identity shift, self-determination, and transferable skills are crucial Life Skills for a successful transition. In terms of spouses/partners of UK Armed Forces serving personnel, employability and networking skills were found to be important, and self-confidence affects spouses' career transition. The development of Life Skills in both Service personnel and spouses is essential in facilitating successful transition outcomes.

Section 4 – Survey and Stakeholder Interview Findings

This section outlines the findings from the stakeholder interviews and online survey of serving personnel and spouses/partners of serving personnel. Specifically it covers the following.

- Level of Life Skills in the Armed Forces community and the reasons for this.
- The Life Skills that are perceived to be most important to Service personnel (and their spouses/partners) in ensuring they make a successful transition to civilian life.
- Support available to develop or improve Life Skills within and outside the Armed Forces.

For information about the demographic and background characteristics of those who took part in the surveys please see Appendix A.

Key Findings:
- The majority of serving personnel (87.2%) and spouses/partners (82.4%; N=42) perceived themselves to have good Life Skills. Only 3.4% of serving personnel and 7.8% (N=4) of spouses/partners felt that they did not.
- Fewer serving personnel (51.7%) thought that they had good Life Skills before they joined the military, suggesting that some of these skills develop over time and whilst serving.
- Spouses/partners rated the following as their top five 'best' Life Skills: literacy skills; empathy; communication skills; critical thinking; and planning. Their 'worst' skills were: self-confidence; mental wellbeing; work-life balance; numeracy; and negotiation skills.
- Serving personnel rated the following as their top five 'best' Life Skills: problem-solving; communication skills; decision-making; critical thinking; and planning. Their 'worst' skills were: applying for jobs; work-life balance; managing own learning; networking; digital skills; and mental wellbeing[12].
- Spouses/partners rated their top five most important Life Skills for transition as: financial/money skills; employability[13]; adaptability; self-confidence; and applying for jobs.
- Serving personnel rated their top five most important Life Skills for transition as: communication skills; employability; financial/money skills; applying for jobs; and self-confidence.
- Stakeholders reported financial literacy and digital literacy as the two key Life Skills that ex-Service personnel/veterans struggle the most with on leaving.
- A combination of survey and stakeholder findings indicate that individual differences (demographic and background variables) play a key role in Life Skills with factors such Service, trade, age, rank, mental health and being a non-UK citizen all impacting.
- Stakeholders suggested that the problems with Life Skills in the Armed Forces community are due to a number of different factors: impact of mobility; everything being done for them; and poor Life Skills on joining.
- However, some stakeholders suggested that Life Skills per se are not the issue; the problem is the application of Life Skills, recognising and applying these skills to a new/novel environment. Stakeholders also said that personnel do not articulate or identify their challenge as a Life Skills deficit; they are unfamiliar with the concept of Life Skills.
- Whilst 66.0% of serving personnel said they had received Life Skills support from the Armed Forces, 92.2% (N=47) of spouses/partners said they had not.
- Fifty-one percent of serving personnel and 70.6% (N=36) of spouses/partners said they did not know how to access Life Skills support should they need it.
- There were mixed views from stakeholders in terms of whether they thought the MOD does enough to help personnel develop Life Skills.
- Concerns around adjusting to civilian life broadly fell into two categories: practical adjustment; and emotional adjustment. Emotional/psychological adjustment (e.g. creating a new identity, finding a new purpose, making friends) was anticipated to be a more difficult than the practical adjustment with 47.9% of military personnel expecting to find this aspect difficult whereas 46.9% of respondents thought the practical adjustment (e.g. finding a house, job, registering with a doctor, etc.) would be easy.

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[12] Digital skills and mental wellbeing were equal fifth.
[13] Financial/money skills and employability were rated equal first.

4.1 – Overview of Life Skills

Most serving personnel (87.2%) and spouses/partners (82.4%; N=42) considered themselves to have good Life Skills. Only 3.4% of serving personnel and 7.8% (N=4) of spouses/partners felt that they did not. Spouses/partners also agreed that their serving spouse/partner had good Life Skills (84.3%; N=43); 5.9% (N=3) disagreed. These findings are echoed by stakeholders, some of whom said that most Service personnel, if asked, would report having good Life Skills (which they did). Stakeholders felt that there is not an overall issue with Life Skills in the Armed Forces community and that most serving personnel (and Service leavers) have *"Life Skills in abundance"* because military training teaches personnel to be *"independent and resourceful and solve [their] own problems".*

> *"The military provides an opportunity to develop a broader skills set than someone of the same age who has worked for [a supermarket], for example."* (stakeholder)

However, when asked about the level of Life Skills across the Armed Forces, responses were lower, with less than half (46.0%) of serving personnel agreeing that military personnel have good Life Skills (18.0% disagreed; 36.0% neither agreed nor disagreed). This would suggest a general lack of awareness on the topic across the organisation and/or perhaps reflects varying levels of Life Skills across the organisation.

Interestingly, only 51.7% of serving personnel thought that they had good Life Skills before they joined the military, suggesting that some of these skills have developed over time and whilst serving. This is further supported by the free text comments. When asked why they think they have good Life Skills, older military respondents commented that Life Skills often develop with age and life experience. They felt that through a combination of their military service and experiences outside this (buying a house, settling down, having children, etc.) they had developed good Life Skills.

> *"Life skills have developed as i have matured…"* (serving person)

> *"You develop these [Life Skills] over the years without realising it"* (serving person)

A few respondents commented that those who join at a young age often have poorer Life Skills because they have only just left school/home and have not had the chance to develop them yet. Having a job/career before joining the military was also felt to be of benefit for some in terms of helping personnel to develop Life Skills, with those who have only ever served viewed as being at a disadvantage. Spouses/partners who felt they had good Life Skills tended to be those living independently (as a family) from the military, residing in their own home with their own career. Spouses/partners who felt that their Life Skills were less well-developed described the constant relocations as making it hard to upskill.

Generally, the Life Skills of military spouses/partners were viewed to be better than those of the serving person/Service leavers by stakeholders. This was because of the view that the spouse/partner would often be living an independent life or was more integrated into civilian society; working in a civilian job, registered with a doctor/dentist, managing their finances, etc. As one stakeholder described it, *"Often the spouse has better Life Skills because they live in the 'real world'"*. This is an interesting finding as this suggests a very practical or perhaps narrow view of what Life Skills are. It focuses on Life Skills as performance outcomes, rather than inputs (skills which when used result in specific outcomes), whereas the literature (and the proposed Life Skills model) suggest they are both.

4.1.1 – Assessment of Life Skills

Participants were asked to assess their ability to use a list of 28 Life Skills, which were drawn from the model and literature/previous research (see Appendix B for the full list). The majority of serving personnel and spouses/partners rated their Life Skills positively, assessing themselves as 'capable' or 'accomplished' in using all the Life Skills listed. The only exception to this was applying for jobs, with more than half of serving personnel (52.7%) rating their level as 'basic' or 'limited' and less than half (40.7%) rating it as accomplished/capable. This response pattern remains the same regardless of whether personnel were undergoing resettlement or not. This is perhaps not surprising as respondents may not have applied for jobs yet (for those undergoing resettlement) or for some time, or even at all, since joining the Armed Forces.

When asked to rate the Life Skills they are best[14] at (see Table 4-1), serving personnel selected what might be viewed as skills typically associated with being in the military. The same could be said for spouses/partners, with spouses/partners selecting similar 'military-related' Life Skills to serving personnel in their top five (communication skills, critical thinking and planning). However, it is important to note that whilst these were selected as the best overall, the percentages are low because there was a wide spread of ratings across the 28 Life Skills. This would suggest that individual differences are at play.

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[14] Please note respondents could select up to five options.

Table 4-1: Best Life Skills

	Serving personnel	Spouses/partners
1	Problem-solving (9.4%)	Literacy skills (11.4%; N=29)
2	Communication skills (7.7%)	Empathy (10.6%, N=27)
3	Decision-making (7.6%)	Communication skills (10.2%, N=26)
4	Critical thinking (5.7%)	Critical thinking (7.8%, N=20)
5	Planning (5.5%)	Planning (5.9%, N=15)

When asked to rate the Life Skills they are worst[15] at (see Table 4-2), responses between serving personnel and spouses/partners were less similar. Spouses/partners rated self-confidence as the skill they were worst at, which is also echoed as a concern in the literature. However, the two that correspond are mental wellbeing and work-life balance, suggesting that in both cases personnel would benefit from support with developing these Life Skills further. However, as before, it is important to note that whilst these were selected as the worst overall, there was a wide spread of ratings across the 28 Life Skills, suggesting yet again that individual differences play a key role and further support is needed across a range of Life Skills.

Table 4-2: Worst Life Skills

	Serving personnel	Spouses/partners
1	Applying for jobs (9.7%)	Self-confidence (10.1%; N=25)
2	Work-life balance (8.1%)	Mental wellbeing (9.7%; N=24)
3	Managing own learning (6.0%)	Work-life balance (7.7%; N=19)
4 (=)	Networking (5.7%)	• Numeracy (5.7%; N=14) • Negotiation skills (5.7%; N=14)
5 (=)	• Digital/IT skills (5.6%) • Mental wellbeing (5.6%)	

4.1.2 – Individual Differences and Life Skills

As demonstrated above, whilst there is some commonality in findings across personnel, the evidence would indicate that other factors also have an impact. Whilst the survey sample is too small to conduct detailed analysis of individual differences, the data indicate that differences exist. For example, Other Ranks were less likely than Officers to rate themselves as accomplished/capable with the following Life Skills.

- Digital/IT skills: 78.3% Other Ranks compared with 93.3% Officers.
- Numeracy skills: 86.8% Other Ranks compared with 97.8% Officers.
- Mental wellbeing: 73.6% Other Ranks compared with 82.2% Officers.
- Networking: 63.2% Other Ranks compared with 73.3% Officers.

Those aged 40 and over were more likely (than those 39 and under) to rate themselves as being accomplished/capable with the following Life Skills.

- Digital/IT skills: 90.9% over 40s compared with 73.6% under 40s.
- Numeracy skills: 96.1% over 40s compared with 83.3% under 40s.
- Empathy skills: 88.2% over 40s compared with 78.9% under 40s.

Together this would suggest that those younger in age and lower in rank require further support to develop their skills. This is further supported by the stakeholder comments, which suggested that the following factors impact, or have a bearing on, personnel's Life Skills.

- **Length of service.** It was suggested that military personnel who have served for a long time can struggle with a different environment when they leave. Long servers vary considerably, and a lot seems to depend on whether or not people have a life away from the Armed Forces; those who are *"cocooned seem to find it much harder"*.

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[15] Please note respondents could select up to five options.

Equally, younger veterans and early Service leavers (four years or less) or those who are unexpectedly discharged (with an injury) were felt to struggle more with their Life Skills.

- **Service.** Stakeholders felt that the Army tend to face the most challenges in terms of Life Skills, largely because they recruit personnel from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Trade.** It was felt that literacy and numeracy skills were not always prioritised by those without a trade (e.g. Infanteers), which poses a problem when military personnel leave as it can have a negative impact when applying for jobs. It was suggested that this group also tends to struggle more with understanding and translating their skillset to a civilian environment.
- **Rank.** A few stakeholders suggested that many of the struggles faced (i.e. translating skills) were the same regardless of rank, while others suggested that differences exist. Some felt that Officers can have unrealistic expectations about the job market and their earning potential, whilst Senior Non Commissioned Officers can undersell themselves or *"underplay their strengths"*. Those junior in rank sometimes lack confidence or do not recognise the skills they have.
- **Mental health.** Those with mental health issues can find it difficult to adjust. At the extreme end are those with PTSD who have particular problems. They can find the bureaucracy a challenge and feel like no one is listening to them, which can result in frustration and anger.
- **Non-UK personnel.** Some stakeholders said that Commonwealth personnel struggle on leaving with the cost of visas, employment challenges, etc. Also, post the UK's exit from the European Union, there was said to be a lot of misunderstanding from non-UK spouses about their immigration status after they leave.

4.1.3 – Poor Life Skills

Whilst the findings suggest that most serving personnel and spouses/partners believe that they do not have poor Life Skills, stakeholders reported that those who struggle on leaving tend to do so with the following Life Skills.

- **Financial skills.** This was identified by stakeholders as the Life Skill that some ex-Service personnel/veterans struggle with the most. Budgeting, money management, financial literacy, financial acumen, knowing how to pay their council tax, etc. were thought to be a challenge for some Service leavers. For personnel who are WIS, it was suggested this can further exacerbate their health conditions. Stakeholders attributed this to a lack of appreciation of the real cost of living because so much is subsidised (e.g. housing, dental care) or taken out of a serving person's salary before they receive it. One stakeholder noted that the Future Accommodation Model encourages families to live off-base within civilian society, meaning that personnel have to manage their money/rent. This will make financial literacy even more important going forward.
- **Digital skills.** This was noted to be an issue for many, but especially older veterans. A lack of basic digital literacy, such as using Microsoft Office or online banking, were mentioned. One stakeholder suggested that part of the problem might be caused by the Armed Forces limited use of commercial off-the-shelf platforms or open source information, resulting in less familiarity with the applications civilians use regularly. However, as with financial skills, many stakeholders acknowledged that poor digital skills were not just a Service issue but a problem facing wider society.

"…there is a UK deficit of digital skills" (stakeholder)

"Financial skills are an issue across the whole of society…financial skills need to be taught at school" (stakeholder)

Other Life Skills that stakeholders mentioned (in order of prevalence) included skills related to the following.

- **Employment.** Some struggle to see the links/translate their skills to a civilian environment, including how to apply them in job applications and Curriculum Vitaes (CVs). Some struggle to sell themselves at interview and instead undersell themselves. However, for many, getting their *"foot in the door"* was viewed to be the biggest challenge.
- **Housing.** It was suggested that some Service leavers lack a clear understanding of their housing options, what might be available, how to get a mortgage, etc. Some believe they are entitled to social housing on leaving Service accommodation when they are not. For others, the cost of rent is so expensive it becomes unsustainable. This in part was felt to be related to personnel having unrealistic expectations about civilian salaries.
- **Healthcare.** Not knowing how to access a National Health Service (NHS) dentist or doctor was suggested as an issue for some.
- **Literacy and numeracy skills.** Poor literacy and numeracy skills were viewed to be an issue for a small cohort of personnel, although it was noted that this is usually addressed during service by the Armed Forces. If personnel

do not have good skills in this area then it is unsurprising that they have issues in other areas. However, as with financial and digital skills, this was noted to be an issue for the general population not just the military.

As noted by one stakeholder, many of these issues (finance, employment, housing, etc.) are interconnected, so it is not always easy to know which issue presented itself first. That said, what the findings clearly indicate is that some personnel do not possess some of the foundation Life Skills which form the building blocks for more complex skills and positive outcomes. Fundamental skills, such as literacy, numeracy, financial literacy, and digital literacy are lacking. It is suggested that perhaps certain skills take on greater prevalence in civilian life, which is why this gap in Life Skills is not clear during service. Regardless, it is suggested that further opportunity for personnel to develop these Life Skills before leaving is needed.

4.1.3.1 – Reason for Poor Life Skills

Stakeholders suggested that the problems with Life Skills in the Armed Forces community are due to a number of different factors, as follows.

- **Impact of mobility.** Problems with continuity of education were noted to be an issue because of mobility. For example, whilst there may be the opportunity to take a qualification on site in one role/location, if the person moves/is posted, the opportunity may not be available to them in their new role/location. This issue was also noted to also affect spouses/partners in terms of upskilling.
- **Everything is done for them.** Stakeholders said that personnel do not realise, or take for granted, how much the Armed Forces does for them whilst serving. Therefore, when they leave they are not prepared: *"…everything is handed to them on a plate and they don't have to stand on their own two feet"*. This was noted to be the case particularly in relation to managing their finances for those living in military accommodation.
- **Poor Life Skills on joining.** It was noted that not all personnel are able to take the available opportunities to improve their Life Skills whilst serving. Those who are vulnerable, from a lower socio-economic status and with poor Life Skills before they join the Armed Forces will often return to the same environment (no family support, no home to go back to, etc.) upon leaving: *"People who join the Armed Forces come from a cross-section of society and then go back to it [when they leave]"*.

From a spouse/partner perspective, one stakeholder suggested, *"It is often the policy that is wrong or the uniqueness of Service life that brings challenges rather than an issue with Life Skills in spouses"*. For example, financial issues for spouses/partners tend to come when the serving person leaves the military and their income drops (though this was noted not to be the case for all). Whilst some spouses/partners might fit the above mould, it was stated that others do not and those have less opportunity to develop or improve their Life Skills. In particular, spouses/partners who have been in the Armed Forces a long time, moved with their serving partner, not worked and then left tend to be the most unprepared/affected.

Some stakeholders suggested that Life Skills per se are not the issue; the problem is the application of Life Skills. For example, it was felt that many Service personnel will have good communication skills, time management skills, and situational awareness and have used these skills in a high-pressured environment. The issue is them recognising this and applying these skills to a new/novel environment (i.e. a civilian setting). Stakeholders also said that personnel do not articulate or identify their challenge as a Life Skills deficit; they are unfamiliar with the concept of Life Skills. Instead, they see it as 'I have an issue with X (e.g. housing), therefore I will get in contact with Y for help': *"I don't think they identify their problems as a Life Skills deficit; they wouldn't articulate it in that way."* In part, this is probably due to the lack of a shared or common understanding of what the term Life Skills means or encompasses. In fact, a respondent to the Life Skills survey said that the survey itself and the definition of Life Skills had made them re-think whether they actually have good Life Skills:

> *"Having seen my answers compared to your definitions I couldn't agree. Before taking the survey, I'd have said yes. This is eye-opening, thank you"* (spouse/partner)

4.2 – Support with Life Skills

4.2.1 – Access to Life Skills Support

Overall, 66.0% of serving personnel said that they had received support from the Armed Forces for some or all of the Life Skills listed in the survey (25.3% said they had not; 8.7% were not sure). Conversely, 92.2% (N=47) of spouses/partners said they had not received any Life Skills support (7.8%; N=4 said they had for some of the skills). Further to this, 51.0%

of serving personnel said they did not know how to access Life Skills support should they need it (46.3% said they did for some/all of the Life Skills listed). An even larger percentage of spouses/partners (70.6%; N=36) said they did not know how to access Life Skills support should they need it (19.6%; N=10 said they did for some/all of the Life Skills listed). In both cases only a small percentage of respondents felt that they did not need any Life Skills support (2.7% of serving personnel and 9.8%; N=5 of spouses/partners). This would suggest that there is a desire from both spouses/partners and serving personnel to receive Life Skills support but that there are gaps in provision and/or challenges accessing this support.

Those undergoing resettlement said that they had received Life Skills support in the form of CV writing, help with job applications and searches, interview practice and financial briefings. Guidance on how to make best use of LinkedIn and help with CV writing were viewed particularly positively. Overall, 57.9% of serving personnel said that they had found the support received useful for their resettlement. However, 28.9% said that they had not received any Life Skills support during resettlement. When asked what else they would like support with, a few respondents suggested that more support with the *"emotional adjustment"* was needed.

> *"…mental resilience and fortitude with coping with the change from a structured military arena where you knew your role and worth to the seemingly unstructured…" (serving person)*

4.2.2 – Support from MOD

There were mixed views from stakeholders in terms of whether they thought the MOD does enough to help personnel develop Life Skills. However, slightly more had a positive view of the support offered than negative. A number of stakeholders agreed that improvements have been made over time: *"the MOD has got better at helping personnel to develop life skills"*. Various improvements were cited, such as: the introduction of the Defence Transition Service; JSP 100 Defence Holistic Transition Policy; the opportunity for apprenticeships; the chance to obtain civilian accredited qualifications or undertake career courses that translate to an easily understood civilian qualification. These were suggested to have *"improved massively in the last five to six years"*. However, two key barriers to making the most of these opportunities were noted. The first was timeliness of resettlement provision. Some stakeholders felt that more needed to be done earlier on in the serving person's career, instead of at the end when it is too late.

> *"…provision is at the end, at the crisis point" (stakeholder)*
>
> *"…the Armed Forces leave it a little too late; need support from day one." (stakeholder)*
>
> *"Personnel don't resettle far enough in advance" (stakeholder)*
>
> *"Preparing people for transition at the point of leaving is too late; need to start sooner." (stakeholder)*

The second was the serving person taking greater responsibility and needing to *"start thinking about leaving the moment they join"*. One stakeholder suggested that there is a *"lack of acknowledgement that being in the Armed Forces is transitory"*. Another said that *"the Armed Forces probably makes available far more advice and guidance than is available to people outside the Armed Forces, but it's horse and water!"*

A subset of stakeholders felt that the MOD could do more to support personnel with Life Skills development. Suggestions largely centred on exposing personnel to opportunities/life outside Defence earlier on (e.g. via secondments) and providing greater reality during resettlement briefings (e.g. cost of living) to ensure personnel leave with realistic expectations and can therefore make informed decisions about their career/jobs and where to live. However, as one stakeholder acknowledged, there is always going to be a tension around the needs of the Armed Forces and the needs of the individual.

> *"[Defence] aim to produce a unit who can fight, not register with a GP [General Practitioner]." (stakeholder)*

4.2.3 – Support outside Defence

Outside Defence, some stakeholders commented that there is a lot of help and support available via Service charities and other businesses to help personnel and their families to improve their Life Skills once they leave the Armed Forces: *"No other community gets the level of support or preparation that veterans do"*. However, barriers to seeking this support were noted, such as knowing what support exists (and passing this information onto their families), suspicion of civilian services and, most notably, reluctance to ask for help because *"this is seen as a weakness"*. It was felt that help-seeking behaviour is often at odds with the training personnel receive during their time in the Armed Forces, which teaches them to be *"independent and resourceful and solve [their] own problems"*.

A few stakeholders felt quite strongly that personnel should know what help is available to them even if there are barriers to seeking support. They suggested that information is well advertised and visible on places like social media. These

stakeholders said that for some Service leavers/veterans there is *"an element here of being blinkered and oblivious"* whilst others *"have that blame mentality; 'it's the military's fault', when things go wrong"*. As noted by one stakeholder, there is a *"need to find the balance between doing it for them and enabling them"*.

It was also suggested that ex-Service personnel sometimes think they are disadvantaged by their previous service, when civilians face the same challenges. One example cited by a couple of stakeholders was trying to register with a civilian doctor or dentist. Ex-Service personnel do not understand the *"perplexity of the health service"* and the challenges that everyone faces trying to register/obtain an appointment.

4.2.4 – Help to Improve Life Skills

Stakeholder organisations reported offering support for improving Life Skills to the Armed Forces community, ranging from nothing at all, to signposting to other support services, to bespoke packages of support for veterans. Some said that this support was outside their remit and should be a statutory provision or the responsibility of the MOD. Those who provided support offered the following types of activities.

- Assessment of functional (literacy and numeracy) skills.
- L1, L2 and L3 qualifications, Open University and distance learning courses.
- Support to find housing.
- Help with addressing financial/debt issues.
- Understanding the job market and what training is available.
- Preparation for work courses for military spouses to upskill and help with CV writing, confidence, their elevator pitch.
- Bespoke courses and insight days.
- Internal facing programmes and internships for military personnel in their last few months of service.
- Advice, information, mentoring and expectation management.
- Buddy scheme with Armed Service network to help people settle in.

However, some challenges were noted, such as a low take-up of literacy training. One stakeholder said that whilst people will admit they cannot read or write or have low literacy levels, they are often unwilling to sign up for training. These individuals are often older in age and are ashamed or have made repeated attempts and have failed. Often they will end up in jobs that do not require this skill, which constrains them further.

Only a minority of stakeholders said that their organisation offered support to spouses/partners.

4.2.5 – Preparing to Move into Civilian Life

In total, 53.4% of serving personnel said that there were areas in which they felt most equipped to make the move into civilian life when they eventually left. However, these areas varied significantly across the sample, indicating that serving personnel feel prepared in very different ways. Many respondents referred to being *"confident"* in their abilities and who they are as a person. Having strong communication skills, a good work ethic and being able to problem-solve were mentioned by others. Some said they felt prepared because they viewed themselves as having relevant qualifications and transferable skills that would enable them to obtain civilian employment. Others referred to being financially prepared/aware or independent from the Armed Forces, living in non-military accommodation, having savings, etc. It is likely that these differences reflect the respondents' varying ages and stages of career.

A similar proportion of spouses said they felt prepared (56.9%; N=29) to make the move into civilian life. When asked why, most said that they were already part of civilian life or were living independently from the Armed Forces, in their own home etc. and leaving would mean *"very little change"* for them.

> *"…I don't need my husband or the Royal Navy in order to have a home, a job, food on the table, schooling for the children, etc."* (spouse/partner)

However, 20.3% of serving personnel and 21.6% (N=11) of spouses/partners responded 'don't know' to this question, suggesting that not everyone feels prepared.

Over 60% (63.9%) of serving personnel and 53.1% (N=26) of spouses/partners thought that they/the family might face specific challenges on leaving. For serving personnel, finding the right job was a key concern for most. These concerns ranged from applying for jobs (i.e. producing a CV, transferring their skills, selling themselves at interview) to finding the 'right' role (that was stimulating, fulfilled their potential but also paid enough) to adjusting to a new civilian work environment. Adjusting to a new identity, (lack of) structure and routine were also concerns due to becoming

"institutionalised". As such, the transition to a civilian world was a concern for many. Finding/purchasing a house/accommodation was also a concern for some. Spouses/partners raised very similar concerns with the potential change of income and affordability of housing being a key concern for them. When asked what would help them manage these challenges, both spouses/partners and serving personnel mainly said more help, guidance and support from Defence with the issues mentioned and more time to prepare to leave.

Those serving personnel with spouses/partners were asked what they thought was going to be the biggest challenge for their spouse/partner when they leave the Armed Forces. The most common response to this question was *"living with each other 24/7"* or *"having me around a lot more"*. This acknowledges a readjustment in family dynamics and perhaps the need for support in making this change. It also further reinforces the importance of considering the family of the serving person in the transition process, not just the serving person.

Survey respondents were asked, if they/their spouse/partner was leaving the Armed Forces in the next year, which Life Skills they could benefit from some help with. Personnel wanted support with all of the Life Skills listed. Again, this supports the individual nature of Life Skills and suggests that personnel all have different needs in terms of the support required. When looking at the most prevalent responses, serving personnel most frequently requested: applying for jobs (68.0%); networking (50.7%); support with employability (44.0%); and digital/IT skills (44.0%)[16]. Spouses/partners wanted help with: mental wellbeing (39.2%; N=20); applying for jobs (39.2; N=20); networking (27.5%; N=14); and self-confidence (27.5%; N=14). This would suggest that military personnel are very focused on practical Life Skills that will specifically help them to gain employment on leaving. Spouses/partners however appear also to be focused on softer skills (i.e. wellbeing, self-confidence).

Respondents were asked, if they were leaving the Armed Forces in the next year, how confident they would be to undertake a number of different civilian/transition-related activities. The top three for both serving personnel and spouses/partners were the same (see Table 4-3). It is interesting to note that both groups report being confident to manage their finances on leaving, when stakeholders reported this as an area of weakness for many veterans.

Table 4-3: Confidence in Activities

	Serving personnel	Spouses/partners
1	Managing finances (89.9%)	Registering with a doctor/dentist (90.2%; N=46)
2	Registering to vote (87.2%)	Managing finances (86.0%; N=43)
3	Registering with a doctor/dentist (81.8%)	Registering to vote (82.3%; N=42)

Areas in which they were less confident included becoming self-employed/registering a business, where in both cases more respondents were unconfident than confident in doing this. In addition, the same proportion of spouses/partners felt confident as unconfident (31.4%; N=16) accessing support such as that provided by Service charities.

4.2.6 – Adjusting to Civilian Life

Stakeholders cited a similar set of key concerns that ex-Service personnel and their families face when adjusting to civilian life. These concerns tended to fall into one of two groups: practical or emotional.

- **Practical Adjustment.** Practical concerns related to issues such as deciding where to live, finding accommodation and gaining employment (and the bureaucracy and paperwork related to this). Gaining and maintaining employment was noted to be a particular concern for the following reasons.
    - A lack of understanding of the employment market, no experience of recruitment processes or corporate experience.
    - Challenges translating skills and experience.
    - Adjusting to the culture of a civilian work environment. A flatter structure in which goals are achieved via *"networks not job titles"* and greater freedom to prioritise their own time/tasks.
- **Emotional Adjustment.** Emotional issues related to a loss of: identity; status; sense of purpose/belonging; social network; and camaraderie. Making new friends was noted to be a challenge, particularly if personnel were older in age and/or had missed *"windows of opportunity"* to make new friends, such as having children in primary school. Adjusting to a civilian environment and moving away from the norms of Service life was described as a challenge.

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[16] Respondents could select all options that apply, which is why the total does not add up to 100%.

This was explored further in the survey with serving personnel. The findings revealed that emotional/psychological adjustment was anticipated to be a more difficult than practical adjustment. Almost half (47.9%) of respondents thought they were likely to find the emotional/psychological adjustment (e.g. creating a new identity, finding a new purpose, making friends, etc.) difficult compared with 27.4% who thought it would be easy (22.6% responded neutrally; 2.1% said they did not know). However, 46.9% of respondents thought the practical adjustment (e.g. finding a house, job, registering with a doctor, etc.) would be easy compared with 21.1% who thought it would be difficult (31.3% responded neutrally; 0.7% said they did not know).

Serving personnel aged 40 and older were more likely to say that they expected practical adjustment to be easy (52.0%) compared with those under 40 (41.7%). Those aged over 40 also expected emotional adjustment to be difficult (52.7%) compared with those younger (43.1%). This suggests that there is an expectation that leaving the Armed Forces will be challenging both practically and emotionally. However, those older in age feel slightly better equipped to manage this practical adjustment.

4.3 – Life Skills Important for Transition

Personnel were asked how important they thought the 28 Life Skills were for a successful transition to civilian life. Between 80% and 100% of all respondents to the question (spouses/partners and serving personnel) rated all the Life Skills as either important or very important. The only exception to that was identity changes (e.g. coping with changes to who you are as a person), which 74.5% of serving personnel rated as important (19.5% rated it as neither important nor unimportant and 6.1% as unimportant). This might suggest that serving personnel are less clear on how important this Life Skill is for transition.

Serving personnel and spouses/partners were asked what they considered the top five most important Life Skills for transition (see Table 4-4). Responses were spread across all the Life Skills, indicating individual differences in what personnel view as important. Interestingly, there is a lot of similarity between the Life Skills that serving personnel and spouses/partners consider to be most important for a successful transition, with four of the five being the same, just in a different order (financial/money skills, employability, self-confidence and applying for jobs). Where they differ is that serving personnel consider communication skills to be the most important Life Skill and spouses/partners rated adaptability as important.

Table 4-4: Most Important Life Skills

	Serving personnel	Spouses/partners
1 (=)	Communication skills (10.2%)	• Financial/money skills (9.6%; N=24) • Employability (9.6%; N=24)
2	Employability (7.3%)	Adaptability (8.4%; N=21)
3	Financial/money skills (6.8%)	Self-confidence (6.0%; N=15)
4	Applying for jobs (6.6%)	Applying for jobs (5.6%; N=14)
5	Self-confidence (5.6%)	

There were some similarities between the responses of serving personnel and spouses/partners and what stakeholders thought were important. Stakeholders identified a number of Life Skills that they felt were important for serving personnel and their spouses/partners in making a successful and sustainable transition to civilian life. These are shown in Figure 4-1. The two most frequently cited skills were resilience and financial skills, closely followed by problem-solving. Financial skills were felt to be important because of their impact on other areas of the individual's life, such as housing, credit ratings, paying the bills, etc., yet were also noted to be the most lacking. Resilience was about coping with setbacks, but was also closely linked to being adaptable and coping with change.

Figure 4-1: Word Cloud of Key Life Skills

The least important Life Skills identified by serving personnel and spouses/partners are shown in Table 4-5. As before, responses were spread across all the Life Skills, indicating individual differences in what personnel view as important. Again, there are similarities between the areas identified as least important by spouses/partners and serving personnel.

Table 4-5: Least Important Life Skills

	Serving personnel	Spouses/partners
1 (=)	• Physical wellbeing (8.9%) • Managing own learning (8.9%)	Empathy (10.2%; N=21)
2	Identity changes (7.7%)	Managing own learning (9.2%; N=19)
3	Empathy (7.3%)	Physical wellbeing (8.3%; N=17)
4 (=)	Work-life balance (6.9%)	• Numeracy (6.3%; N=13) • Negotiation skills (6.3%; N=13) • Work-life balance (6.3%; N=13)

When comparing the best/worst and most/least important rated Life Skills there is little commonality between the best and most important skills for either serving personnel or spouses/partners. The exception to this is communication skills, which serving personnel rate as one of their best Life Skills and one of the most important for transitioning to civilian life. Interestingly, serving personnel rate applying for jobs as one of the most important Life Skills but one that they are worst at. The same is true for self-confidence for spouses/partners. This would suggest that these are two areas in which further Life Skills support is needed.

What is interesting is that there is more synergy between respondents' worst skills and those they consider to be least important: work-life balance and managing own learning for serving personnel; and work-life balance, numeracy and negotiation skills for spouses/partners. Whether these are truly the least important, or personnel want them to be the least important because this is where there skills are lacking, is unclear.

4.4 – Summary

The findings from the survey and stakeholder interviews suggest that overall, serving personnel and spouses/partners perceive themselves to have good Life Skills, with only a small minority identifying as having poor Life Skills. The small minority most affected by poor Life Skills (and in need of more support) tend to be those lower in rank and younger in age, who have not had the chance to develop their skills, or who had poor Life Skills on joining. Comparatively, individuals are more likely to be affected by poor Life Skills if they are without a trade; serving in the Army; struggling with mental health issues; and non-UK citizens.

The problem Life Skills poses for some was largely attributed to the Armed Forces lifestyle: the impact of mobility and not having to do things for themselves. This was noted to be particularly problematic for those who have poor Life Skills on joining and then leave early without the chance to 'upskill'. The findings certainly suggest that Life Skills are developed over time, with age and service. Those living a more independent life from the Armed Forces were felt to be better equipped. That said, whilst there are clearly groups more in need of support than others, the findings indicate a strong desire from many to receive support to develop their Life Skills. What is needed/wanted varies widely, indicating that personnel require support with different skills and that a 'one size fits all' solution is not the answer. However, there are some specific areas in which increased help would be particularly useful. This includes increased support to serving personnel with applying for jobs and help with digital/IT skills (especially for Other Ranks and those younger in age). Both were rated as one of their top five worst skills by serving personnel and ones with which they would like more support. Digital/IT was also reported by stakeholders to be a key Life Skill that Service leavers struggle with. This would suggest a gap in Life Skills provision in this area, which needs to be addressed. Spouses/partners need assistance with self-confidence, which they rated as one of the most important Life Skills for transition but one at which they are worst. Both groups also need more support with financial literacy, mental wellbeing and the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life.

In addition to the above, financial/money skills were rated in the top five most important Life Skills for transition by both serving personnel and spouses/partners. Both groups also reported being confident to manage their finances on leaving in the future; however, neither serving personnel nor spouses/partners rated financial/money skills in their top five best skills currently. In fact, stakeholders reported that many of those who struggle with Life Skills on leaving the Armed Forces tend to do so because of a deficit in financial literacy. In part, this might suggest that perhaps the Life Skills required for a successful transition are not fully understood or developed on leaving.

In terms of support, there were mixed views from stakeholders as to whether the MOD does enough to help personnel develop Life Skills. This was further reflected in the survey findings, which indicated that whilst the vast majority of spouses/partners had not received Life Skills support from Defence, two-thirds of serving personnel had. Across both groups, knowing how to access Life Skills support was an issue. Outside Defence, some stakeholders commented that there is a lot of help and support available via Service charities and other businesses to help personnel and their families once they leave the Armed Forces to improve their Life Skills. Stakeholder organisations reported offering support ranging from signposting, to other support services, to bespoke packages of support for veterans. However, challenges in help-seeking behaviour were noted, as is reported in other veterans research studies (Fisher, Newell, Barnes, Owen, & Lyonette, 2021; Lyonette, Barnes, Owen, Poole, Fisher, & Newell, 2020).

Section 5 – Case Studies of Life Skills Programmes

This section of the report pulls together the key findings from a review of the effectiveness of existing Life Skills programmes via five case study examples. The aim of this review was to explore:

- what Life Skills programmes exist and which Life Skills they cover;
- how effective existing Life Skills programmes are; and
- how existing Life Skills programmes engage with their target audiences.

The full case studies can be found in Appendix C.

Key Findings:

- The Life Skills programmes described in the five case studies vary considerably in size, from offering one-to-one, intensive support, to helping millions of people.
- The case study organisations are clear about why they offer Life Skills programmes. The organisations are all driven by a strong sense of purpose, whether this is related to their mission, their company values, their own core skills, or their wish to 'do good' via their corporate social responsibility policies.
- The programmes are clear about the target participants they wish to attract, and design the content and delivery mechanisms of their programmes around their participants.
- All case studies have methods of assessing both the quality of their programmes and their impact, with impact focusing on individuals' achievements and positive outcomes for the organisations.
- Of particular relevance to Defence are the following.
  - It is clear, from the Novus and Swansea Bloom programmes in particular, that people emerging from a relatively structured environment (which the Armed Forces is) may need both practical and emotional help to enable them to live independently and form new social networks in their community.
  - The BT Skills for Tomorrow materials, such as the 'how to' guides, could be very useful in terms of practical support for Service leavers and their families. The Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

The below write-up is based on the following case study organisations.

1. Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) Life Skills course: chosen for its focus on professional adults (rather than the more frequently-encountered focus on disadvantaged sections of the population).
2. Barnardo's: chosen for the organisation's support to young adults leaving the care system, and for the variety of programmes offered under the overall Barnardo's umbrella.
3. Barclays LifeSkills: selected because of its focus on employability and its status as a well-known programme offering support to adults.
4. Novus: selected because its activities are aimed entirely at delivering, to the prisoner and young offender population in the UK, the skills to live crime-free on release into the community.
5. BT Skills for Tomorrow: chosen because of its particular focus on improving the digital skills of the population, and its varied programmes with different target audiences.

5.1 – Why do these Organisations Offer Life Skills Programmes?

The reasons for offering Life Skills development vary by organisation, as detailed below.

- CPPE sees Life Skills as being part of the personal development of its members, with personal development being one of three areas within which courses are offered, the other two being clinical expertise, and leadership and business skills. The Life Skills of self-awareness and reflection, included in the Life Skills course, are seen as important attributes of the well-rounded pharmacy practitioner.
- Supporting and protecting vulnerable children and young people, and helping them to fulfil their potential despite their difficult backgrounds, is Barnardo's core mission. Life Skills are seen as essential to help disadvantaged young people to survive and develop.
- The Barclays LifeSkills programme is funded by the company as part of its commitment to corporate social responsibility. In common with many large companies, Barclays aims to use some of its resources to do good

work within society. Mainly this is an end in itself, although a strong corporate social responsibility agenda also helps the company's brand image and is viewed positively by existing and potential employees.

- Novus is part of the Learning, Training & Employment Group, a UK social enterprise dedicated to improving lives and economic success through learning and skills; for Novus, delivering Life Skills training to prisoners and young offenders is part of this core objective.
- For BT, the Skills for Tomorrow programme and its component parts are very important in helping the company to deliver its mission, 'We connect for good.' Like Barclays, BT funds its programmes via its corporate social responsibility agenda, and the positive publicity and awards won by the programmes contribute towards its positive brand image. Employees also welcome the opportunity to volunteer in schools and colleges. An added benefit is that the Fast Futures programme provides possible recruits for BT.

5.2 – Participants

5.2.1 – Target participants

The five case studies have programmes that aim their offering at groups of people, including different groups within the overall programme that are well-defined.

- CPPE is a professional body offering continuing development to the approximately 72,500 pharmacists, trainee pharmacists and pharmacy technicians who are registered with it. The Life Skills course is only available to these registered members.
- As the Barnardo's case study demonstrates, the Barnardo's charity runs a variety of programmes, either directly or via other bodies through its commissioning process; its overall aim is to support and protect vulnerable children and young adults. The two examples described in the case study are a study programme aimed at 16- to 19-year-olds at risk of missing out on formal education in the North of England, and a Swansea-based programme aimed at developing the emotional and social wellbeing of care leavers aged 18 to 25.
- The Barclays LifeSkills programme is primarily for young people aged under 25. Its resources are appropriate for children of all ages, young adults, and their parents/guardians. There is some additional content for older adults e.g. the provision of advice regarding changing career or becoming self-employed.
- Novus is the education provider at 45 adult men's and women's prisons and three young offenders' institutions (for those aged 15 to 21) in England.
- BT's overall Skills for Tomorrow programme aims to improve the digital skills of people of all ages. Under this overall umbrella are several programmes aimed at specific groups: FastFutures is a study programme for young people aged 18 to 24; Work Ready is a training programme for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); and Small Business Support is a programme offering support to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs).

5.2.2 – Attracting and Recruiting Participants

Clarity around the target groups of participants enables the programme providers to adopt different tactics for reaching their target populations. For two of the case studies, it is relatively easy to attract participants, because they have clear boundaries within which to operate: CPPE publicises its Life Skills course on its website, together with directions about how to apply for a place; while Novus has, quite literally, a 'captive' audience to which it can offer its basic skills and vocational courses.

Other organisations have to assess which are the best methods to use to attract and recruit their participants. It is apparent that these methods differ depending on the type of participant that is being targeted.

- The two Barnardo's programmes rely to a large extent on referrals from other agencies in the geographical area, such as Social Services Departments in local authorities, although both programmes take self-referrals and the North of England programme has outreach workers. The programmes are aimed at vulnerable people in society, who may not have the skills to carry out their own searches to find help and typically do not have a supportive family network.
- The Barclays LifeSkills programme typically works with schools and colleges, and communicates with these via an education agency it has commissioned to help with its communications. The programme also recruits participants via communications with clubs for young people, such as football and boxing clubs. In addition,

Barclays central marketing runs an annual advertisement to publicise the programme. Finally, the website, where much of the content can be found, is easy to find for those who are actively searching for help.

- BT also adopts a variety of mechanisms to attract and recruit participants. For its wide-audience activities and courses, the company runs mass media campaigns. In addition, Jobcentre Plus often points people who need to improve their digital skills to these resources, and many people self-refer after finding the website online. The FastFutures programme, which has the aim of identifying and developing digital talent in young people from diverse backgrounds, uses outreach partners such as Jobcentre Plus, charities and influencers to directly appeal to suitable individuals. The Work Ready programme for NEETs, which is area-based, typically reaches its target audience via local job centres, charities and community-based clubs and projects. Finally, the Small Business Support programme uses BT's website and LinkedIn to engage with potential participants.

5.3 – Content

As might be expected from the different participant groups and different aims, the content of the Life Skills programmes in the five case study organisations varies considerably.

- The CPPE Life Skills course aims to deliver or enhance a variety of skills that all contribute towards being a well-adjusted, thoughtful and well-organised practitioner: self-awareness; reflection; emotional awareness; stress management; assertiveness; influencing others; mentoring; and practical self-management.
- The two Barnardo's programmes, while both core to the charity's mission to support disadvantaged young people, have very different content, in line with their different aims.
  - o The focus of the North of England programme is to deliver the basic skills for employability to young people who find formal education difficult to cope with. Maths, English and digital skills are seen as essential, and the programme also provides vocational skills training and work placements.
  - o The Swansea Bloom programme has a very different focus, i.e. to support care leavers with the emotional and social issues they are likely to encounter when they have to survive independently in the community, usually without having any stable family or friendship networks. The content of the programme has three main parts: life coaching; befriending; and the enhancement of social skills via activities and events.
- The content of the Barclays LifeSkills programme is geared towards employability, including helping students still at school to identify their career preferences. The material available to young people, and those who advise them (teachers, parents, etc.), includes identifying personal skills and preferences, seeking and getting work, managing finances and budgets, and improving personal skills such as self-awareness and confidence-building. The material for adults covers similar areas (presented in ways more suitable for the audience) plus debt management and advice on changing careers. Work experience used to be offered, but since the COVID-19 pandemic, this has been replaced by an online work experience that enables a group of people to work together on a project.
- Novus offers content that has some similarity with the Barnardo's North of England programme, i.e. the provision of basic English, maths and digital skills from Entry Level 1 to Level 3. Vocational and technical education in areas such as catering are also offered, enabling participants to gain National Vocational Qualifications at Level 1 and 2, and the 'Novus Works' partnership with 200 employers enables some prisoners and young offenders to obtain employment and apprenticeships when they are released from custody. Enrichment and engagement activities are also available, in particular for young people who have poor social and interpersonal skills.
- The content provided by BT varies considerably, depending on which programme is being considered. The 'Skills for Tomorrow' website offers many activities under the headings of 'Home life' (e.g. managing bank accounts, 'how to' guides on using GP and other online services, and digital wellbeing) and 'Work life' (e.g. launching and building a business, choosing a career and getting a job). 'Fast Futures' is a structured study programme covering five areas: finance; digital marketing; data; teamwork; and innovation. 'Work Ready' focuses on improving the employability skills of disadvantaged young people, with activities in areas such as team-building, gaining confidence, customer service skills, goal-setting, networking and self-presentation, job shadowing and taking part in a mock assessment centre. Finally, 'Small Business Support' focuses on helping SMEs to maximise their online presence and use digital technology effectively.

5.4 – Delivery

In a similar way to the content, the broad delivery methods chosen by the case study organisations are very much in line with the nature and needs of the programme participants. Content for participants who are likely to be reasonably IT-literate and self-organised, for example, tends to be delivered online.

- The CPPE Life Skills course is run entirely online. It is structured into eight weekly sessions of four hours, with participants being guided through reading and other activities by a tutor, and being given the opportunity to network.
- Novus facilitates prisoners and young offenders who have some academic qualifications to engage in higher-level distance learning, much of which is delivered online and requires participants to work through material and complete assignments independently.
- BT's FastFutures programme carries out an assessment of potential participants' attitudes and mind-sets before admitting them to the programme, as it involves 10 hours of study per week for six weeks to complete the five modules. There are live webinars, panel discussions and group work as well as self-driven learning.
- The Small Business Support programme's activities (for example, webinars and courses) are also delivered mostly online, as a reasonable level of digital competence and self-organisation is assumed. However, there are also in-person opportunities such as local networking.

By contrast, programmes with participants who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and who struggle with formal education are typically delivered face-to-face.

- Both of the Barnardo's programmes are entirely face-to-face, as participants typically need a lot of support and guidance, sometimes even one-to-one sessions; at Swansea Bloom, for example, all participants have an allocated engagement worker to support them, and have one-to-one sessions with a life coach.
- The Novus basic skills and vocational skills courses are all delivered face-to-face, as are the enrichment and engagement activities, as many individuals require a lot of personal attention and support. Where appropriate, in-person work experience is available to participants.
- Although the Barclays LifeSkills material is all open source and free to participants, the majority of it is downloaded and used within schools and colleges, facilitated by teachers, tutors and sometimes volunteers from Barclays. Some of the online content is aimed specifically at parents who want to guide their children through the process of assessing their skills and interests in order to identify possible career paths.
- BT's Work Ready programme is aimed at NEETs who typically need a considerable amount of face-to-face support and attention. During the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the material was moved online, but it was returned to face-to-face as soon as possible; this was mainly due to the nature of the participant group, although BT's shadowing opportunities were also thought to be far better in person, giving participants a proper feel for the workplace.

5.5 – Measuring Effectiveness

There is little information available on the case study organisations' websites regarding how they assess the effectiveness of their programmes overall, although the Barclays LifeSkills website refers to annual independent evaluations being carried out.

- There are some success stories (for example on the Novus and Barnardo's websites) of individuals whose participation in a programme has resulted in their lives being transformed, for example by gaining employment, getting qualifications, overcoming difficulties, and generally breaking the cycle of worklessness and disadvantage, sometimes even homelessness.
- The CPPE website contains a testimonial about the Life Skills course, and explains that individual participants can demonstrate they have successfully gained the skills included in the course via an assessed piece of reflective writing.

The interviews with people from the three full case study organisations (Barnardo's, Barclays and BT) who are responsible for managing programmes, however, yielded a considerable amount of information regarding the metrics used to judge effectiveness.

- Barnardo's in the North of England judges its success mainly by the number of qualifications obtained by participants at different levels, the number of apprenticeships completed, and the progression of those aged 16

to 19 into further education, apprenticeships or employment. There is also external assessment by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). In addition, the acquisition of self-management skills such as regular attendance and timekeeping by participants are monitored.

- The Barnardo's Swansea Bloom programme is a relatively new one. It aims to gradually increase the number of care leavers who come onto the programme, and has KPIs related to the number of referrals and the number of participants who, after being mentored and supported themselves, join the peer mentoring scheme to help others. Individual impact is monitored via tracking every participant's progress against their personal goals. Positive local media reports and positive feedback from participants are valued as evidence of the programme's success.

- Barclays has metrics focusing on scale and impact. Scale relates to the number of people participating (i.e. using the programme's materials either via schools/colleges or via direct access) every year. Impact is externally evaluated every year by an independent research provider, with the emphasis being mainly on outcomes for participants. There are also brand impact measures.

- BT uses the 'Reach + Quality + Impact = Value' framework to assess the effectiveness of its programmes. Reach is a key indicator for the Skills for Tomorrow programme, which aims to involve as many people in the population as possible in using its materials to develop their digital skills. Reach is also important for FastFutures, Work Ready and Small Business Support, in the sense of counting the number of participants and attempting to maximise these numbers. Quality is judged mainly via participant feedback, including completion rates, while impact, for FastFutures and Work Ready, is assessed mainly by getting people into employment (including employment with BT). Winning awards for its programmes is also seen by BT as an indicator of success. Finally, in common with Barclays, BT has brand impact measures.

5.6 − Relevance to Defence

Some broad points can be drawn from the case studies that are relevant to Defence.

- Although several of the case studies focus mainly on basic skills needed for employment, such as numeracy, literacy and digital skills, it is clear that skills focusing on self-awareness, social interaction and emotional wellbeing are also considered very important; the CPPE Life Skills course and the Swansea Bloom programme illustrate this point very clearly.

- Other programmes, notably Barclays LifeSkills, demonstrate that employability requires more than basic numeracy, literacy and digital skills; interpersonal skills, self-awareness, team-working and self-presentation skills are also very important to employers.

- Some of the Life Skills programmes featured in these case studies are aimed at young people and adults who are societally disadvantaged, even vulnerable, but this is not the only client group that can benefit from Life Skills input. This point is illustrated by the CPPE Life Skills course (for professionals) and BT Skills for Tomorrow (aimed at improving the UK population's skills).

- It is clear, from the Novus and Swansea Bloom programmes in particular, that people emerging from a relatively structured environment may need both practical and emotional help to enable them to live independently and form new social networks in their community.

- The BT Skills for Tomorrow materials, such as the 'how to' guides, could be very useful in terms of practical support for Service leavers and their families. The Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

5.7 − Summary

The Life Skills programmes described in the five case studies vary considerably in size, from the Swansea Bloom project, offering one-to-one, intensive support to a small number of locally-based care leavers, to BT's Skills for Tomorrow, with its target of helping 25 million people to improve their digital competence by 2026. The programmes have different content and are aimed at different participant groups. Nevertheless, they have some features in common, as follows.

- The case study organisations are clear about why they offer Life Skills programmes. The organisations are all driven by a strong sense of purpose, whether this is related to their mission, their company values, their own core skills, or their wish to 'do good' via their corporate social responsibility policies.

- The programmes are all very clear about the target participants they wish to attract, and design the content and delivery mechanisms of their programmes around their participants.

- Finally, they all have methods of assessing both the quality of their programmes and their impact, with impact focusing on individuals' achievements and positive outcomes for the organisations.

Section 6 – Frameworks for Evaluating Life Skills Provision

A key component of this study was to review existing evidence on the effectiveness of monitoring and assessment tools in measuring the success of Life Skills, or similar programmes, and then to develop a framework or frameworks for evaluating the effectiveness of the provision for developing Life Skills within the UK Armed Forces. This was conducted via a combination of a REA and a series of research team workshops.

Key Findings:

- Two different frameworks have been developed: the first to enable evaluation of the maturity of Life Skills provision as a whole across the Armed Forces; and the second to assess reactions and outcomes to specific aspects of life skills development (e.g. particular development programmes) at an individual or organisational level. Both are needed if the Armed Forces is to understand the effectiveness of its Life Skills provision and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation. The frameworks are as follows.
    1. A Maturity Model with six dimensions (scope, content of provision, who it is available for, when it is available, how the provision is implemented and/or promoted to potential users, and how the provision is evaluated) has been developed to enable the Armed Forces to evaluate their Life Skills development provision.
    2. The second framework includes six levels. Four of these are identical to those in the Kirkpatrick Model with the addition of 'awareness' and 'outcomes' to improve the utility of this framework in relation to the development of Life Skills.

The evidence review identified seven existing methods or approaches relevant to the evaluation of Learning and Development Programmes that could be adapted for use in the Armed Forces to evaluate Life Skills development provision. These were: Learning and Performance Maturity Model (e.g. Thompson, 2004); Kirkpatrick Model (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2015); Phillips Return on Investment Methodology (e.g. Phillips & Phillips, 2011); Brinkerhoff Success Case Model (e.g. Brinkerhoff, 2005); Weinbauer-Heidel Levels of Transfer Effectiveness (e.g. Weinbauer-Heidel & Ibeschitz-Manderbach, 2018); Thalheimer's Learning Transfer Model (e.g. Thalheimer, 2018); and the Relevance, Alignment and Measurement Model (e.g. CIPD, 2022). Each of these models is presented in more detail in Appendix D.

As a result of this review and the discussion at the first of the three workshops, it was clear that two different approaches should be taken to assess Life Skills development in the Armed Forces: first, to evaluate the maturity of the provision as a whole across the Armed Forces; and second, to assess reactions and outcomes to specific aspects of Life Skills development (e.g. particular development programmes) at an individual or organisational level. The research team consider both of these approaches important if the Armed Forces are to understand the effectiveness of their Life Skills provision and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation. Therefore, two different frameworks were developed. Based upon the analysis of the above, these two frameworks were built upon the Learning and Performance Maturity Model and the Kirkpatrick Model. The details of each model are presented below.

6.1 – Maturity Model

The Maturity Model is designed to allow the Armed Forces to evaluate the maturity of their provision for Life Skills development and support across a number of levels. Table 6-1 provides an overview of this Maturity Model with broad qualitative descriptors for each level. The levels represent different stages on the journey to providing Life Skills development and support, moving from organisations that are just starting to develop basic provision (emerging), through to those who have very well-developed, cutting-edge provision (advanced). This model could be used either by the MOD Centre or by individual Front Line Commands.

Table 6-1: Overview of the Maturity Model

Level	Description
Emerging	• Advice and support for Life Skills is provided on an ad hoc basis with no defined strategies, processes, and system in place.
	• Advice and support are reactive to individual needs and provided on request.
	• No internal training or formal development for Life Skills is offered, outside that driven by national policy.
	• Personnel may be signposted to external Life Skills provision on request.
	• Personnel's Life Skills are not evaluated.

Evolving	• A number of training programmes are offered in Foundational Life Skills. • These programmes are available to a limited number of Service personnel, in particular, those in resettlement, on request. • There is no overarching strategy for Life Skills development or evaluation.
Developed	• Foundational and Complex Life Skills are offered. • These are available to all Service personnel on request. • Support is also available to Service leavers for one year after leaving. • Individual training programmes are evaluated through participant reactions ('happy sheets').
Advanced	• A strategy for developing Life Skills in all Service personnel has been developed and is embedded in the broader learning and development strategy. • Foundational skills are included in initial and resettlement training for all Service personnel. • All Service personnel are evaluated for life skills at points throughout their Armed Forces career, and a tailored development programme is offered based on the outcome. • Training is available to all current Service personnel and to Service leavers for up to five years after leaving; also to spouses/partners. • Both reactions and impact of the Life Skills development is evaluated. • A designated Life Skills team is in existence with a sufficient budget. • The organisation has a culture of continuous learning.

Defence is likely to be at different levels on this Maturity Model for different aspects of their Life Skills provision. It is useful to break the model down into different aspects, to allow more detailed assessment, enabling the Armed Forces to more easily identify their strengths and weaknesses. This more detailed model is presented in Table 6-2. The detailed Maturity Model includes six different dimensions of Life Skills development provisions: scope; content of provision; who it is available for; when it is available; how the provision is implemented and/or promoted to potential users; and how the provision is evaluated. The Armed Forces could therefore evaluate their provision as emerging, evolving, developed or advanced for each of the six dimensions.

Table 6-2: Life Skills Maturity Model

	Emerging	Evolving	Developed	Advanced
What is the scope?	Life Skills development is ad-hoc and reactive, with no defined strategies, processes and support in place.	Life Skills development is more proactive, with some programmes in place.	A comprehensive set of Life Skills programmes are available on request.	Life Skills are fully integrated with broader learning and development strategy.
What is provided?	• Advice and support. • Signposting to external service provision.	• Development programmes for Foundational Life Skills.	Development programmes for Foundational and Complex Life Skills.	• Comprehensive Life Skills development strategy, embedded in broader learning and development strategy. • Foundational Life Skills training during initial training and resettlement. • Life Skills evaluation (mandatory). • Tailored development programme based on evaluation.

For whom is it available?	Anyone who looks for it.	• Limited segments of Service personnel, particularly those Early Career and those in resettlement.	• All Service personnel on request. • Service leavers up to one year.	• All Service personnel offered tailored programmes. • On request to Service leavers up to five years. • Spouses/partners of Service personnel, on request.
When is it available?	• On request throughout Service.	• Mainly early career and during resettlement or when raised during reporting cycle.	• During Service, resettlement, and up to two years after leaving.	• During Service, resettlement, and up to five years after leaving.
How is it implemented/ promoted?	Advice available online (e.g. via MODNET and My RAF app) and via external provision.	• Service leavers are informed of the training and support offered as part of the resettlement process. • Programmes advertised on MODNET/Service apps.	• Promoted during initial training and during resettlement, as well as via MODNET/Service apps. • Chain of Command was made aware of available provision.	• Designated Life Skills team and budget. • Promoted during initial training, resettlement, and as part of reporting process. • Regular Life Skills Evaluations conducted for all Service personnel.
How is it evaluated?	No evaluation.	Evaluations of the individual's **awareness** of the training, whether they **use** the training, their **reaction**, and their **learning** of the training.	Evaluations of the individual's **awareness** of the training, whether they **use** the training, their **reaction** and their **learning** of the training, and the **results** for the individual.	Evaluations of the individual's **awareness** of the training, whether they **use** the training, their **reaction** and their **learning** of the training, the **results** on the individual and organisation.

6.2 – Using the Maturity Model

The framework has deliberately not been limited to the provision that is currently provided by the MOD Life Skills team, but is designed to consider Life Skills development and support across the Armed Forces as a whole. This means that any audit or assessment using the Maturity Model should involve multiple stakeholders, including those in Life Skills, training and development, and resettlement.

The framework comprises six different domains, each representing a different dimension of Life Skills development and support within the Armed Forces. These include the following.

1. Scope: the overall scope of Life Skills provision; whether a Life Skills strategy is in place; whether this is integrated into broader learning and development strategy.
2. What is provided: the content of the Life Skills provision; which Life Skills are covered; whether support, development and evaluation are included.

3. For whom is it available: whether Life skills provision is available to all serving personnel, veterans and partners or spouses of serving personnel.
4. When it is available: whether the provision is only available on request or is pushed out to users; the length of time after leaving the Armed Forces it is available.
5. How it is implemented/promoted: how well the provision is communicated to potential users.
6. How it is evaluated: whether the provision is evaluated and at what level.

Within each domain, there are a number of levels of maturity, ranging from emerging, to advanced. These levels are as follows.

1. Emerging: the lowest level of provision.
2. Evolving.
3. Developed.
4. Advanced: represents best practice in Life Skills provision, based upon the Learning and Performance Maturity Model.

The Maturity Model could be implemented at the level of the unit, Front Line Command or across the MOD. Users should reflect on the content of each cell and decide which level best represents each aspect of the Life Skills provision. Users should aim to be introspective, objective and fair; decisions regarding maturity levels should rest on how the situation actually is rather than how they would like it to be. The framework is intended to be developmental, and should therefore be used as the basis for decisions about future developments of Life Skills provision in order to move the provision up through maturity levels where this is practical.

6.3 – Evaluation of Programme Outcomes

The final line of the Maturity Model above focuses on the evaluation of programme outcomes at the individual and organisational level. The second framework described here is designed for that purpose and is an extended version of the Kirkpatrick Model. This model includes six levels (see Table 6-3). Four of these are identical to those in the Kirkpatrick Model: Use; Reaction; Learning; and Behaviour. To improve the utility of this framework in relation to the development of Life Skills, the dimensions of 'awareness' and 'outcomes' have been added. The framework below shows each of the dimensions at the individual and organisational level.

Table 6-3: Framework for Evaluating Programme Outcomes

	Dimension	
	Individual	Organisational
Awareness	Is the individual/spouse/partner aware of Life Skills training?	What is the proportion of population segments aware of Life Skills training?
Use	Did the individual/spouse/partner use the Life Skills training?	What proportion of each relevant population segment used Life Skills training?
Reaction	How satisfied was the individual/spouse/partner who used the Life Skills training?	What proportion of individuals were satisfied with the Life Skills training?
Learning	Did the individual/spouse/partner who undertook the training find that their Life Skills improved (in line with the intended learning outcomes of the programme)?	What proportion of individuals improved their Life Skills (in line with the intended learning outcomes of the programme)?
Individual Behaviour	Did the individual/ spouse/partner take (different) action as a result of the Life Skills training?	-
Outcomes	Did the individual/ spouse/partner's "life outcomes" improve as a result of their actions/learning? E.g. did they gain employment?	What proportion of the population gains desirable life outcomes on resettlement (e.g. employment)? To what extent was the organisational performance improved (e.g. operational efficiency, wellbeing, attraction, retention)?

6.4 – Using the Framework for Evaluating Programme Outcomes

In order to use this model effectively, the Armed Forces will need to collect data against each of these aspects. In some cases, existing data exist that could be adopted for this purpose. In others, new data will need to be collected. Some suggestions of these measures are listed below. As the organisational level is to a large extent the aggregate of the individual level in this framework, these are treated together in Table 6-4 below.

Table 6-4: Potential Measures for Evaluating Programme Outcomes

Level	Measures	Source
Awareness	Level of awareness of provision, proportion of Armed Forces veterans/spouses aware of provision.	Surveys.
Use	Number of training courses completed; proportion of Armed Forces veterans/spouses completing each course.	Enrolment data.
Reaction	Satisfaction with programme(s)/provision.	Post-course evaluation sheets. Defence Continuous Attitude Survey data.
Learning	Possession or improvement of Life Skills.	HARDFACTS, evaluations of numeracy and literacy.
Behaviour	Evidence of a change in behaviour.	
Outcomes	Employment e.g. time taken to get a job, the continuity of employment, proportion of veterans in work. Health e.g. prevalence of mental health issues. Accommodation e.g. proportion of veterans that are homeless.	Leavers/veterans surveys.

6.5 – Summary

Having reviewed existing methods or approaches relevant to the evaluation of Learning and Development Programmes that could be adapted for use in the Armed Forces to evaluate Life Skills development provision, the team decided that a bespoke framework(s) was required. Two different frameworks have been developed: the first to enable evaluation of the maturity of Life Skills provision as a whole across the Armed Forces; and the second to assess reactions and outcomes to specific aspects of life skills development (e.g. particular development programmes) at an individual or organisational level. Both are needed if the Armed Forces are to understand the effectiveness of their Life Skills provision and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation.

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Section 7 – Conclusions

Looking at the findings from the study in relation to the original research questions, the following conclusions can be drawn.

7.1 – What are Life Skills?

Life Skills are generally considered to encompass a range of abilities and competencies that enable individuals to manage their daily activities effectively. One thing that is clear from this study is that Life Skills is a nebulous concept. A thorough review of the literature reveals countless different definitions, which encompass a variety of different types of skills, all of which are context- and purpose-dependent. Whilst this may be appropriate, broadly speaking it is unhelpful as it means people have different definitions or models/frameworks in their mind when considering this topic. Certainly, stakeholders within this study felt that military personnel are unfamiliar with the concept of Life Skills. Instead, a clear and single definition and framework needs to be agreed for a Defence context in which Life Skills are considered as both inputs and performance outcomes. With this in mind, the team suggest adopting the following definition proposed by Robinson et al. (2014) that defines Life Skills as *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes"* (p. 2). This definition is broad and comprehensive, thus allowing it to be used across multiple contexts, as well as providing a useful summation of other published definitions.

Alongside this definition, the team suggest adopting the revised Life Skills framework, updated from the Robinson et al. (2014) report (see Figure 7-1).
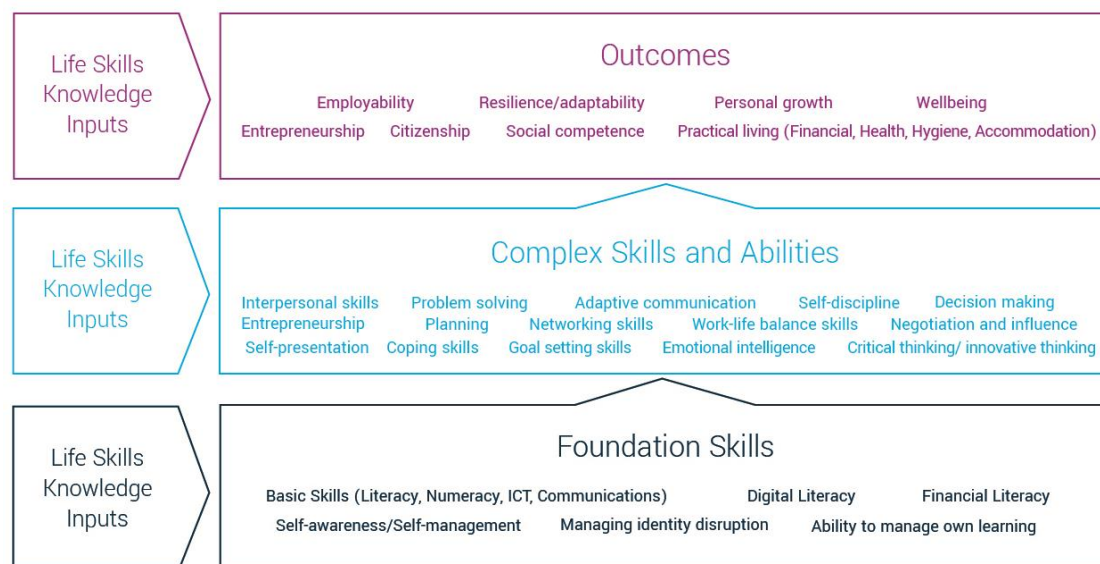

Figure 7-1: Life Skills Framework

The evidence review conducted as part of this current study found nothing to refute the original model of Life Skills developed by Robinson et al. (2014), indicating that the three levels (foundation skills, complex skills and abilities, and outcomes) and the specific Life Skills contained in each level remain valid/relevant. However, it is clear that the scope of Life Skills has expanded with changing economic and societal demands to include the following Life Skills.

- Foundation skills: financial literacy; digital literacy; managing identity disruption.
- Complex skills: adaptive communication; cognitive-behavioural skills; goal-setting skills; work-life balancing skills; coping skills; networking skills; critical thinking/innovative thinking; and emotional intelligence.
- Outcomes: wellbeing and entrepreneurship.

It is suggested that, after further validation, the MOD should adopt both this definition and framework going forward.

7.2 – What is the Current Life Skills Deficit in the Armed Forces Community, and what Accounts for this Deficit?

The findings from the study suggest that overall there is not a significant issue with Life Skills in the Armed Forces community (military personnel or spouses/partners). Most serving personnel and spouses/partners assessed themselves

as having good Life Skills, as stakeholders expected. Only a small minority identified as having poor Life Skills. However, within this, there are some groups more affected than others. In this way, Life Skills might best be described as a low prevalence problem that has high impact amongst the small community that are most affected. This community includes those lower in rank and younger in age, who have not had the chance to develop their skills, or those who had poor Life Skills on joining. Comparatively, individuals are more likely to be affected by poor Life Skills if they are without a trade; serving in the Army; struggling with mental health issues; and non-UK citizens.

The reason Life Skills pose a problem for some was largely attributed to the Armed Forces lifestyle: the impact of mobility (resulting in a lack of continuity of education) and not having to do things for themselves (leading to a lack of opportunity to hone certain skills). Having poor Life Skills on joining was also noted to be an issue, especially for those leaving early without the chance to 'upskill'. The findings certainly suggest that Life Skills are developed over time, with age and experience. Those living a more independent life from the Armed Forces were felt to be better equipped, having had the chance to operationalise some of the key Life Skills before leaving.

In terms of where the gaps are in Life Skills across the Armed Forces community, it is clear that personnel need and require support across a range of different skills, suggesting that a 'one size fits all' solution is not the answer. However, there are some specific areas in which increased help would be particularly useful. This includes increased support to serving personnel with applying for jobs and help with digital/IT skills (especially for Other Ranks and those younger in age). Both were rated by serving personnel as among their top five worst skills and ones they would like more help with prior to leaving. Digital/IT was also reported by stakeholders to be a key Life Skill that Service leavers struggle with, indicating a possible gap in provision that needs to be filled. Spouses/partners need assistance with self-confidence, which they rated as one of the most important Life Skills for transition but one that they are worst at. Both groups also need more support with financial literacy, mental wellbeing and the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life.

A reason why this 'deficit' in Life Skills remains in some pockets of Defence is partly due to the way in which the support is delivered. Whilst a lot of information is available, it relies to some extent on the individual seeking this information out. In part, an individual's ability to access and make use of this information will be dependent on how good their foundation Life Skills are. Personnel with poor literacy or digital skills are more likely to struggle. This means that those individuals who would perhaps benefit most from these resources are the least likely to access them. This concern is further supported by the case study findings, which demonstrate that those most in need of help with Life Skills require face-to-face support, while those wanting to develop more complex Life Skills are able to seek help independently, and can cope with/benefit from distance learning type activities.

Help-seeking behaviour also presents a challenge. As noted, previous studies have identified a well-documented stigma or shame to seeking help within the military population. If the development of some Life Skills requires personnel to reach out for support, this presents a further blocker or challenge to receiving support. Addressing gaps in Life Skills also relies on personnel being able (and honest) to recognise that they have a Life Skills deficit in a particular area.

7.3 – Which Life Skills are Most Important for Service Personnel and their Spouses/Partners in Ensuring they make a Successful and Sustainable Transition to Civilian Life? What are their Main Concerns in being able to Adjust both Individually and as a Family?

Unfortunately, there is not a simple and single answer to this question. Pinpointing the specific impact of Life Skills on transition is challenging because of the interlinked nature of factors. As a result, only a few attempts have been made in the literature to explore the association between the development of particular Life Skills and transition outcomes. Those researchers suggest that coping skills, adaptability, self-awareness in identity shift, self-determination, and transferable skills are crucial Life Skills for a successful transition for military personnel. In terms of spouses/partners, employability, networking skills and self-confidence were found to be important.

When asked directly, serving personnel and spouses/partners cited a wide array of different Life Skills that they perceived to be important for a successful transition. However, the most important (rated by both cohorts) were felt to be: employability; financial/money skills; self-confidence; and applying for jobs. This would suggest that, for many, a successful transition is still largely defined by finding a job.

The Life Skills most frequently cited by stakeholders for a successful transition were financial skills and resilience, closely followed by problem-solving. Financial skills were felt to be important because of the impact on other areas of the individual's life. Although recognised as an important skill by both groups, neither serving personnel nor spouses/partners rated financial/money skills in their top five best Life Skills. In fact, many stakeholders reported financial literacy as a Life Skill that Service leavers struggle with the most. This would suggest that financial literacy is a key Life Skill for transition, and one that is not fully developed at the point of leaving.

Expanding upon the above point, this difference between Life Skills whilst serving and then on leaving is evident in the data. The data show that the Life Skills personnel rated in their top five bears no resemblance to those they consider to be most important for transition (with the exception of communication skills for serving personnel). This would suggest a gap or a disconnect between the Life Skills that are both developed and perceived as important by personnel whilst serving and those needed outside this environment: *"...so the better question is, do i have good Life Skills or good Army skills?"* The indication is perhaps that some Life Skills (such as financial literacy) take on greater importance on leaving.

In terms of leaving the Armed Forces community and adjusting to civilian life, concerns largely fell into two categories: practical; and emotional/psychological adjustment. Generally, across the study the findings suggest a preoccupation with gaining practical Life Skills that will specifically help personnel to obtain employment on leaving, at the expense of what might be described as 'softer skills'. This is interesting considering that serving personnel reported being more concerned with the emotional/psychological adjustment, which they anticipated as being more difficult than the practical adjustment. Specifically, some acknowledged a readjustment in family dynamics that perhaps they may require support with.

7.4 – What Support is Currently Available to Develop or Improve Life Skills for Adults Generally (Within and Outside the Armed Forces)?

Within Defence, Life Skills support for military personnel depends on career stage. Previous research (Robinson et al., 2014) identified Life Skills provision across the following stages of a Service career.

- **Early Career.** Focused on preparing personnel for their Armed Forces career. Mostly delivered within a short period of time during Phase One training.
- **Mid-Career Mandatory.** Focused on developing complex skills and abilities needed by Service personnel to develop their command and leadership competences.
- **Mid-Career Elective.** Focused on enhancing employability in civilian life.
- **Late Career.** Focused on employability and practical living, delivered through the resettlement process and tailored to the needs of the individual.

Life Skills provision within Defence involves providing guidance and signposting to required support and is delineated from training, education and other skills. The single Services are responsible for delivering Life Skills support during service, meaning that approach can vary between them. However, a common approach on leaving is evident. Service leavers receive a resettlement package through the CTP and further development of Life Skills as part of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy. The MOD also has a Service Leavers' Guide (MOD, 2020) for those thinking about, and in the process of, transitioning to civilian life. This guide is in the process of being 'rebranded' into a through-career handrail for Service, including Life Skills advice, information and guidance. Its introduction will embed transition as a 'cradle to grave' process, giving all serving personnel and their families the ability to identify gaps in knowledge and seek further information on key Life Skills topics throughout their career and alleviating the potential for too much information, too late, and not enough time to absorb it. This is a welcomed change, as the evidence would suggest that current provision is not reaching personnel as intended. Survey responses indicate that the vast majority of spouses/partners had not received any Life Skills support from the Armed Forces. Further to this, over half of serving personnel and nearly three quarters of spouses/partners said that they did not know how to access Life Skills support should they need it.

Outside Defence, a variety of programmes exist to help adults improve their Life Skills. These programmes are often (but not exclusively) aimed at young adults and/or people who are societally disadvantaged. Examples include the following.

- Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills in the North of England, which aims to provide education to young people aged 16 to 19 who are unable or unwilling to participate in mainstream education.

- Barnardo's Swansea Bloom programme aimed at supporting care leavers, who are often vulnerable and isolated when leaving the care system, to live independently.
- The Marks & Start programme, which is designed to impart employability skills to disadvantaged young people who are struggling to gain employment.
- Barclays LifeSkills programme, primarily for young people aged under 25.
- BT's Skills for Tomorrow programme, which aims to improve the digital skills of people of all ages. Under this are specific programmes as follows.
  - o FastFutures, a study programme for young people aged 18 to 24.
  - o The BT Work Ready programme is for young people who are NEET.
  - o Small Business Support, which offers support to SMEs.
- Novus education services, which aim to give prisoners and young offenders the Life Skills that will help them turn their lives around when their sentence ends via gaining employment.
- CPPE, which offers a course to members that is broadly positioned as personal development.
- The City Literary Institute, London, offers a variety of fee-paying courses to adults with the broad aim of enhancing health and wellbeing.

Whilst they all vary according to their context and purpose, which in turn drive the approach, there are commonalities amongst them. These include: clarity of purpose; an understanding of the target audience; and content and delivery designed around their participants. There are also a number of lessons that can be learned from these examples, which are of relevance to Defence, as follows.

- People emerging from a relatively structured environment need both practical and emotional help to enable them to live independently and form new social networks in their community.
- Whilst there is a focus on foundation skills, there is also recognition that complex skills and outcomes are important to develop. These more complex skills (e.g. interpersonal skills, self-awareness, self-presentation, etc.) are considered very important to employers.
- Whilst societally disadvantaged and vulnerable people can indeed benefit from Life Skills input, so can a broader group, including those in professional roles.
- The BT Skills for Tomorrow materials, such as the 'how to' guides, could be very useful in terms of practical support for Service leavers and their families; the Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

7.5 – Which Monitoring and Assessment Tools could be used to Measure the Effectiveness of any Future Life Skills Programme for Serving Personnel and their Spouses/Partners?

Having reviewed the plethora of monitoring and assessment tools, the team have developed their own two frameworks: the first to enable evaluation of the maturity of Life Skills provision as a whole across the Armed Forces; and the second to assess reactions and outcomes to specific aspects of Life Skills development (e.g. particular development programmes) at an individual or organisational level. Both are needed if the Armed Forces are to understand the effectiveness of their Life Skills provision and the impact it has on individuals and the organisation. Before they are rolled out, it is suggested that these frameworks are tested and adjusted (as necessary) via the conduct of a pilot trial.

Section 8 – Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, a series of recommendations have been made, mainly for the MOD. It is important to note that these are not solely the responsibility of the Life Skills team; rather some will sit with the CTP, training, etc. In this way, Life Skills are the responsibility of multiple teams who should work in a joined-up way to address the challenges.

- The MOD should adopt a single definition and framework of Life Skills to confirm that all personnel have the same understanding of what Life Skills are and what they comprise. This definition should be: *"those skills that lead to the positive behaviours that underpin successful personal, social, work and civic outcomes"* (Robinson et al., 2014). It should be incorporated into JSP 100. Coupled with this, Defence should also adopt the Life Skills framework shown in Section 7 for serving personnel, veterans and their spouses/partners. Prior to adoption, the framework should be further validated and piloted before being rolled out more broadly across the community.
- To ensure personnel are both suitably equipped during their Service and prepared on leaving, Defence should provide greater Life Skills support in the following areas.
    - Financial/money skills.
    - Digital/IT skills (for serving personnel).
    - Assistance with self-confidence.
    - Mental wellbeing.
    - Applying for jobs. Support with applying for jobs could include a requirement for military personnel to produce and update their CV after each role change whilst in-Service. This could help to embed the practice of applying for jobs and develop understanding of how to translate military skills and experience into 'civvy speak'.
    - Help with the emotional/psychological adjustment to civilian life. Support with the emotional/psychological detachment from the Armed Forces could take the form of coaching and/or mentoring to provide ex-Service personnel with the opportunity to talk through their experiences with someone outside their family who understands what they are going through. Establishing an alumni association or a recent Service leavers network that is focused upon employment and related challenges could be another way to address this.
- Whilst developing practical, foundation skills are important, this should not be at the detriment of complex skills and abilities, especially when considering employment. The MOD should provide the opportunity to develop these skills too during Service.
- All information provided to support Life Skills development (e.g. the Army's 'Transition to Civilian Life' information sheets, Service Leavers Guide etc.) must be delivered in such a manner that it as accessible and useful to all personnel, including neurodiverse individuals and those who may otherwise struggle. It could also be useful to make accessing this information a mandatory part of training to ensure that all personnel have reviewed it.
- Whilst providing guidance and signposting to required Life Skills support will be sufficient for many, for those most affected by poor Life Skills (and least likely to reach out for help), further help and support is needed. For these groups, Life Skills inputs need to go beyond just signposting, to more classroom-based and/or practical support. One way to achieve this could be for Defence to continue to endeavour to make it possible for Service personnel to establish a life outside the military (e.g. living in their own accommodation, spouse/partner in employment), which would provide opportunities to operationalise or hone their Life Skills whilst in Service so they are better equipped for life after the Armed Forces.
- As supported by JSP 100, transition out of the Armed Forces should start far earlier in the career of a serving person so that military personnel can acquire the skills they need for leaving throughout their military career. This should include active consideration of their Life Skills and where further development might be required. The MOD should make it clear how the skills they teach are useful outside the military.
- To help address stigma around help-seeking behaviour, Defence needs to create a psychologically safe culture/environment in which people are comfortable to admit that they are lacking certain skills and are able to ask for help.
- To identify who is likely to be most affected and in need of support, a risk-based model should be developed that identifies individuals who are at greatest risk of Life Skills problems both during Service and on leaving (e.g. those lower in rank and younger in age who have not had the chance to develop their skills, those with poor Life Skills on joining, etc.). Creating this risk-based model would allow the MOD to direct their provision more effectively and limit the need for help-seeking behaviour, thus providing these groups with more targeted support.
- The MOD should look to make use of existing Life Skills resources. Outside the Defence setting there are available sources such as the BT Skills for Tomorrow 'how to' guides, which could be very useful in terms of practical

support for Service leavers and their families; the Small Business Support programme could also be helpful to Service leavers thinking about becoming self-employed and setting up their own business.

- The evaluation frameworks should be implemented into Defence, both into the MOD centre and Front Line Commands. Prior to roll out, the frameworks should be piloted and tested and adjusted as required.

Section 9 – References

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Appendix A – Participant Profile

Appendix A outlines who took part in the survey, their demographic characteristics and background information.

> **Key Findings:**
> - The survey sample was reflective of the Armed Forces population with regards to the fact that the majority of military personnel were: white; male; and/or Other Ranks. However, the largest proportion of respondents were from the RAF rather than the Army, making it less representative.
> - Accessing all participants was a challenge, but particularly the spouse/partner population.

Serving Personnel

Of the 151 respondents:
- The majority were male (82.3%) and White[17] (94.0%).
- Nearly two thirds (61.8%) were between 30 and 49 years of age.
- 47.7% were RAF; 39.7% were Army; and 12.6% Royal Navy (including Royal Marines).
- 29.8% were Officers and 70.2% were Other Ranks.
- Their length of service ranged from 1 to 43 years with an average (mean) of 19.1 years. 67.8% had joined since the year 2000.
- The majority of the sample were not undergoing resettlement (72.2%) (27.8% were).
- Just over half of the sample were either from: Scotland (22.8%); the South East (18.1%); or the South West (16.1%) of England. The rest were spread across the UK.
- 67.1% of the sample had caring responsibilities (children and/or adults).

Spouses/Partners

Of the 51 respondents:
- All who responded to the question identified as female (100%; N=50) and nearly all were White (98.0%; N=49).
- The majority (80.4%; N=41) were between 30 and 49 years of age.
- Just over half of the sample were either from: the South West (35.3%; N=18); or South East (19.6%; N=10) of England. The rest were spread across the UK.
- 82.3% (N=42) of the sample had caring responsibilities (children and/or adults).
- 54.9% (N=28) were the spouse/partner of someone in the Army; 23.5% (N=12) the RAF; and 21.6% (N=11) the Royal Navy (including Royal Marines).
- 54.0% (N=27) were spouses/partners of Officers and 46.0% (N=23) Other Ranks.
- Their serving spouse/partner's length of service ranged from 1 to 40 years with an average (mean) of 18.8 years. 64.0% said their serving spouse/partner had joined the Armed Forces since the year 2000.

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[17] The rest of the sample comprised of the following groups: Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, mixed/multiple ethnic groups and other ethnic groups.

Appendix B – List of Life Skills

Below is the list of Life Skills against which survey participants were asked to assess themselves.

1. **Literacy skills** (e.g. reading and writing).
2. **Numeracy skills** (e.g. using maths skills and understanding data).
3. **Communications skills** (e.g. talking and listening to others).
4. **Digital/IT skills** (e.g. using a computer, writing emails, finding information on the internet).
5. **Financial/money skills** (e.g. knowing how to set up and manage a bank account, create a budget and manage it).
6. **Self-awareness** (e.g. knowledge and understanding of who you are as a person).
7. **Self-confidence** (e.g. trust in your own abilities and judgement).
8. **Empathy** (e.g. understanding how others feel).
9. **Managing own learning** (e.g. taking charge of your learning experiences).
10. **Social skills** (e.g. working with others, making new friends).
11. **Self-presentation** (e.g. showing yourself in a good way to others).
12. **Decision-making** (e.g. knowing how to choose the best option in a given situation).
13. **Problem-solving** (e.g. overcoming an issue).
14. **Critical thinking** (e.g. analysing and evaluating an issue to form a judgement).
15. **Negotiation skills** (e.g. reaching an agreement with others).
16. **Self-discipline** (e.g. working in a controlled way to achieve a goal).
17. **Planning** (e.g. working out how to do something before you do it).
18. **Time management** (e.g. being organised and on time for appointments).
19. **Physical wellbeing** (e.g. hygiene, keeping fit and eating healthy meals).
20. **Mental wellbeing** (e.g. looking after yourself emotionally and mentally, coping with stress and/or change).
21. **Networking** (e.g. interacting with others to exchange information and create contacts).
22. **Resilience** (e.g. recovering from setbacks).
23. **Adaptability** (e.g. being able to adjust to a new environment/change).
24. **Identity changes** (e.g. coping with changes to who you are as a person).
25. **Applying for jobs** (e.g. writing a CV, preparing for interviews).
26. **Finding accommodation** (e.g. finding a house/somewhere to live).
27. **Employability** (e.g. being suitable for paid employment or self-employment).
28. **Work-life balance skills** (e.g. balancing time between work and family/leisure activities).

Appendix C – Full Case Studies

Below are the following full case studies.

1. CPPE Life Skills course.
2. Barnardo's.
3. Barclays LifeSkills.
4. Novus.
5. BT Skills for Tomorrow.

Life Skills Case Study 1: Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) Life Skills Course

The organisation

CPPE is part of the Division of Pharmacy and Optometry within the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health at the University of Manchester. It was created in 1991 and is a not-for-profit organisation, funded by Health Education England.

CPPE's team offers CPD opportunities to pharmacists, trainee pharmacists and pharmacy technicians via a large number of courses and learning materials offered online, together with face-to-face events held in different locations in England. The CPD on offer falls into three broad categories: clinical expertise; leadership and business skills; and personal development.

The programme

The full name of the Life Skills course is 'Life Skills – developing your potential'. It is positioned in the broad area of personal development. Considerable emphasis is placed on reflection and the development of self-awareness, and participants are advised that they might also find it useful to access the CPPE e-lecture entitled 'Reflection', a short 30-minute learning programme aimed at the development of reflective skills.

In addition to the specific Life Skills course described here, the CPPE provides a wide range of guides and courses focused on the enhancement of transferable skills that could also be seen as Life Skills. Examples taken from a much longer list include goal-setting, managing people, facilitation skills, overcoming anxiety, being resilient, and work-life balance.

Participants

The Life Skills course is available to everyone who is registered with the CPPE, namely pharmacy trainees, qualified pharmacists, and pharmacy technicians. The CPPE engages with potential participants via its website, where the Life Skills course and other development courses and materials are described, together with relevant information regarding how to sign up for courses.

Content

The content of the Life Skills course is not described on CPPE's website. However, the learning outcomes below suggest that there is a focus on a mixture of skills: being a reflective practitioner, practical self-management, techniques to maintain emotional wellbeing, and working with and supporting others, including how to increase personal influence. On completion of all aspects of this learning programme, participants are advised they should be able to:

- Describe and apply reflective practice.
- Describe the concept of emotional intelligence.
- Identify problem areas in your time management and apply planning methods effectively.
- List the methods and benefits of networking and team working.
- Describe three practical exercises to deal with stress and anxiety.
- Apply a range of basic assertiveness techniques at work.
- Apply key techniques to increase your influence over others.
- Support others to develop by applying mentoring and coaching techniques.

Delivery

'Life Skills' is a structured e-course, run entirely online, focused on helping participants to reflect on their personal skill set and develop a range of transferable life skills. The eight weekly sessions (32 hours of content in total, in four-hour blocks) require participants to engage 'fully and actively with the content'. The course is tutor-supported, meaning that participants work through the course at a defined pace, aided throughout by a CPPE tutor. Each week, participants are given reading and activities to complete, and are given the opportunity to network with others on the course. There is a menu to enable participants to navigate through each area and to access each unit and its content separately.

Measuring effectiveness

Individual participants are assessed via a short (400 to 800 words) reflective essay. The essay questions ask for a narrative, i.e. a story that describes their personal thoughts on the learning topic and how they have used it to change the way they work. The essay is marked as a pass or fail, with an opportunity to re-submit. Although it is not compulsory to write and submit this essay for assessment, gaining a pass provides evidence that participants have worked through the programme/guide, have reflected on their personal practice, and have applied the learning. The essay also contributes to participants' personal development plan and enables them to enter the course on their CPD record.

No information is available on CPPE's website regarding how the course is evaluated more widely, for example to ensure it is fit for purpose, up-to-date, meets its objectives and is, overall, successful. However, several things indicate that a degree of evaluation/review does occur, or has occurred. Firstly, after it was first launched in 2014, it was reviewed in 2021, although no details of the review are given; secondly, it is described as a 'popular' course, suggesting it is well-subscribed and well-liked by students; and thirdly, positive feedback from one participant is featured:

> "This course has been one of the best I have ever enrolled in. It's taught me a lot about myself in terms of where I am presently, and where I could improve. It has changed the way I perceive the world and I am now more conscious about my actions and those of others."

Relevance to Defence

The majority of Life Skills programmes aim to impart skills that might enable the more disadvantaged people in society to function better day-to-day, and/or to gain employment. As such, the content tends to focus on aspects such as: basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills; financial- and self-management; how to access housing, medical, dental and benefits support; and employability skills such as composing a CV and being interviewed.

CPPE's Life Skills course, however, has a very different focus and target audience, in that it is aimed at a group of people who already have educational and professional qualifications and are employed in a healthcare profession that enables them to follow a defined career path. The emphasis of the course is on firstly gaining transferable skills such as self-awareness and reflection, and secondly applying these skills in day-to-day work. Interviews with Defence stakeholders suggest that experienced, well-qualified Service personnel (even those in senior ranks) can struggle, especially when they leave and enter the different culture of civilian life, and that their difficulties often revolve around their emotional wellbeing. This suggests that all Service personnel could benefit from Life Skills input that focuses on aspects such as self-awareness and reflection.

Source

All the material in this case study was taken from CPPE's website on various dates during November 2022: www.cppe.ac.uk

Life Skills Case Study 2: Barnardo's

The organisation

Barnardo's has a long history, going back to 1867 when Thomas John Barnardo set up a 'ragged school' in London in 1867, then in 1870 opened his first home for boys, where they received not only find shelter and food, but also training and apprenticeships. He refused to discriminate between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, instead believing that every child deserved the best possible start in life, whatever their background; a philosophy that still guides the charity today. By Barnardo's death in 1905, the charity had 96 homes caring for more than 8,500 vulnerable children. After World War II, the charity began working more closely with families; the need for children's homes started to decrease, especially from the 1960s onwards when single parenthood became less of a stigma. Barnardo's increasingly focused less on residential services and more on supporting families and working with children with physical, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The charity today has a very diverse portfolio. It supports and protects vulnerable children and young people facing a wide range of issues: drug misuse, disability, sexual abuse, poverty, dysfunctional families and domestic violence. It also provides training and support to young people seeking employment, and support to young people leaving care, with much of this work being delivered on a regional or local basis. Some programmes are run directly by Barnardo's, others are commissioned by the charity and run by other bodies; in addition, Barnardo's seeks funding from other charitable sources in order to assist with the delivery of services to young people. The following two very different examples illustrate the variety of the charity's work.

| Example 1: Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills in the North of England |

The programme

Barnardo's has contracts with the Educational and Skills Funding Agency to deliver study programmes and apprenticeships to 16- to 19-year-olds who are at risk of missing out on mainstream education; further information about the programme participants is given in the section below. Additional funding for the programme is provided by several large commercial/corporate donors, often via their corporate social responsibility and/or diversity programmes. The additional corporate funding enables Barnardo's to run, among other things, a ten-week course to prepare young people for work experience in these companies.

The main training centre is based in North Shields, with two regional training centres located in Bradford and Halesowen, both areas of relative deprivation. Figures from a 2019 Ofsted inspection indicated that 116 learners were following age 16 to 19 study programmes, there were 77 apprentices, and a further 11 learners were on adult learning programmes.

Participants

Barnardo's 16 to 19 study programmes are aimed at any young people who, for whatever reason, are unable to join mainstream education provision; they might, for example, be vulnerable, lacking in confidence, in danger of exclusion from school or college, or in pupil referral units. Broadly, the goal is to boost the life chances of these young people by improving their employability and vocational skills so they can be competitive in the job market. The charity's open-door policy means that hardly anyone is turned away, and participation is free.

The Barnardo's lead for Employment, Training and Skills in the North of England explained that it can be difficult to reach target participants. Various methods are used, such as outreach programmes, via local authorities (social services), referrals from housing/tenancies associations, young people transitioning from fostering, youth offenders and other partner organisations. Young people can also come forward themselves, including some who like the sound of the course and the way it is delivered, with a high level of support, preferring it to traditional college courses.

When young people come to Barnardo's for help, either voluntarily or via a referral, the first step is to explore their social needs, do an assessment of their level of maths and English, find out about their previous educational attainment, and explore their learning styles (visual, auditory etc.). According to the programme lead, it takes a while to build up trust, up to six weeks, especially the social skills element. There is a degree of reaching out to other family members, notably participants' siblings, as the family context is always taken into account.

Content

The main focus for 16- to 19-year-olds is maths, English and vocational skills, broadly to assist with employability; support is also given to participants in building a CV and practising interview skills. However, there are also 'enrichment activity' input covering different aspects of living independently, such as managing finances, coping/resilience, and getting advice about housing and applying for benefits. In recent years, there has been a much greater focus on digital skills (boosted during the COVID-19 pandemic), and some more specialist areas have been added as needs arise. Ultimately, however, the aim is to help disadvantaged young people to gain the skills and qualifications they need to obtain employment; in this sense, the programme content is led by the labour market.

Work experience is a major element, with both independent training and work-based learning being delivered to participants. In addition to the big corporates, hundreds of SMEs locally and all around the UK help by offering work placements. SMEs probably provide the bulk of opportunities for young people wishing to learn a trade such as hairdressing, construction, painting and decorating etc.

Delivery

Various delivery methods are used for training and education: classroom-based, work-based and online. There was a big shift to online provision from March 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic; Barnardo's ran a successful fund-raising appeal to provide every young person on the programme with a laptop, connectivity (assisted by one of the big providers), food parcels and gas/electricity tokens. Since then, online delivery has continued where appropriate, and Barnardo's has found that some people who are not good classroom attenders are better attending online.

Most Barnardo's centres have a mentor/counsellor, and there are also some specialist staff at Barnardo's in certain areas. In addition, every participant has an allocated keyworker who is their 'go to' person for support and guidance. Within the employment and training skills service, Barnardo's programme participants are viewed as future possibilities for these key worker roles, because other disadvantaged young people will identify with them due to their similar background and youth.

Measuring effectiveness

A variety of success factors are used: qualifications achieved at different levels; completion of apprenticeships; progression rates of those aged 16 to 19 into a positive destination (education, apprenticeships, employment); and the acquisition of softer practical skills such as regular attendance and turning up on time. Some of the training and education is regulated by Ofsted, although it is important to understand that when assessing these vulnerable young people, a 'good' rating for attendance and gaining qualifications might appear low in other contexts. The 2019 Ofsted report, for example, is very positive about many aspects, notably the support given to young people; the development of their personal, social and vocational skills; and, on completion of their studies with Barnardo's, the good progression to further/higher education, apprenticeships or employment. However, it also points out the failure of some participants to attend regularly, leading to slow progress in English and maths.

In addition, various formal measures are provided to commissioners such as the number of young people on different parts of the programme and completion rates.

Example 2: Swansea Bloom

The programme

Bloom, which is based in Swansea, has been in operation since April 2022 and is staffed by a small team of five: a life coach, a children's services manager, a volunteer co-ordinator, and two engagement workers. It is aimed specifically at care leavers aged 18 to 25, to help them achieve their potential and develop resilience. Care leavers frequently feel isolated when they leave the relatively structured environment of the care system; this isolation was particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, as care leavers missed out on the social interaction with their youth worker.

There are three main parts to Bloom's service:

- Life coaching i.e. goal-setting and a 12-week programme that encourages participants to think positively, builds confidence and promotes wellbeing.
- Befriending and peer mentoring.
- Opportunities to enhance social skills and team building via events and activities such as a weekend residential trip.

Unlike other Life Skills programmes that often have employability as their main aim, Bloom focuses mainly on emotional and social aspects, a relatively neglected area, according to the Bloom life coach.

Essentially, the aim of Bloom is to reduce loneliness and anxiety in care leavers and give them the skills, self-esteem and confidence to help them achieve their goals and potential.

Participants

Bloom works with care leavers aged 18 to 25 in the wider Swansea area. Young people are mainly referred by Social Services in Swansea Council, although young people can self-refer and introduce others. Bloom aims particularly at care leavers who could easily get missed – such as the quieter ones who are struggling, but do not have the sort of major crises that might alert the authorities.

There are around 200 care leavers in Swansea, and Bloom is currently supporting around 10% of these, with an aspiration for this percentage to increase as time goes on. Reaching target participants is assisted by Barnardo's already having a big presence in Swansea. In addition, Bloom is building up its social media presence and has had some positive media coverage e.g. from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Wales Today, the Evening Post and Wales Online.

When a young person is referred, a risk assessment is completed, usually by the key worker, although sometimes the young person will self-assess with some help. This risk assessment is important, because it acts as a baseline to assess progress. In addition, not everyone is suitable for the Bloom programme; for example the team does not have trained mental health expertise, so those with high mental health needs are signposted to therapeutic services elsewhere. Once on the programme, young people work with the life coach and engagement worker to draw up a plan with goals and how to achieve these. A tool called the 'Outcomes Star' is used for this.

Content

When deciding what Bloom should offer, the existing services in Swansea provided by other agencies were examined beforehand; Bloom aims to complement other services rather than duplicate what already exists, notably by providing the emotional support that is sometimes missed by services that are more practically oriented.

Bloom's main focus is on the following.

- Coping skills.
- Communication skills.

- Self-care.
- Positive relationships.
- Stress management.
- Wellbeing.

Engagement workers also help programme participants with practical things like Universal Credit applications and writing CVs, however, especially if these are linked to the participant's goals.

Every care leaver in the programme has a dedicated engagement worker, and also the option of a befriender. Typically, participants have a lot of intensive support, i.e. two sessions a week with the engagement worker and/or the life coach, plus a weekly club. The programme, including activities and residentials, is free to participants, and Bloom works with other agencies to provide participants with important necessities such as bus passes to help them travel to their sessions and clubs.

Although Bloom's main focus is not employability, the programme offers training in peer mentoring. This gives young people a chance to give something back by helping others, and also enables them to gain a mentoring qualification which in turn can help them find a job. The activities and residentials also provide practical experience in skills valued by employers such as team building and collaboration. Bloom provides references for programme participants who are seeking work.

Delivery

Although virtual meetings are available to participants, especially those living some distance from Swansea, almost everything Bloom offers is face-to-face, either in the community or at Barnardo's in Swansea: goal-setting, befriending, activities, clubs and residentials.

Measuring effectiveness

Bloom is a new service and at the time of the interview had only been running for a few months. There are KPIs such as the number of referrals and the number on the peer mentoring scheme, but as yet no specific targets relating to these. The programme has been funded (under the Barnardo's umbrella) for a year initially by the Moondance Foundation, but funding is not dependent on achieving certain KPI targets.

To assess whether participation in the programme has been a success for individuals, the Outcomes Star tracks every individual participant's progress, and Bloom plans to keep in touch with people once they have left the programme, to track what and how they are doing. There are also case studies to demonstrate successful outcomes, although for those managing and staffing Bloom, the main way of assessing how the programme is doing is the positive feedback from young people using the services.

Relevance to Defence

At first sight, it might appear that the Barnardo's examples, with their focus only on young people, are not very relevant to Defence. However, they illustrate very strongly, that:

- Social and personal skills are very important for employability, as well as qualifications;
- People emerging from a structured environment can find it difficult to cope;
- Building networks in the local community helps to give stability and end isolation, especially for those without reliable families to provide assistance;
- Support – emotional as well as practical – is needed while people are establishing themselves in a new setting and/or in employment.

Sources

This case study draws on material gathered from the following sources.

- The Barnardo's website, accessed in August and December 2022: www.barnardos.org.uk.
- An interview in August 2022 with the lead for Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills in the North of England.
- The 2019 Ofsted report for Barnardo's Employment, Training and Skills.
- An interview in September 2022 with the Bloom life coach.

Life Skills Case Study 3: Barclays LifeSkills

The organisation

Barclays website[18] describes how the Barclays business can be traced back to two Quakers called John Freame and Thomas Gould, who established themselves as goldsmith bankers in Lombard Street in the City of London in 1690. The name 'Barclay' was introduced early in the company's history when James Barclay, Freame's son-in-law, joined the firm in 1733. Over the centuries, the company grew, expanding firstly into East Anglia, then the rest of England, Scotland and Wales. Today, Barclays describes itself as 'a British universal bank. We support consumers and small businesses through our retail banking services, and larger businesses and institutions through our corporate and investment banking services.' The company defines its purpose as: to deploy finance responsibly to support people and businesses; to act with empathy and integrity; to champion innovation and sustainability; and to act responsibly for the common good and the long term. Its five Values are Respect, Integrity, Service, Excellence and Stewardship.

Barclays is a British multinational bank, headquartered in London, operating as two divisions, Barclays UK and Barclays International. It has a primary listing on the London Stock Exchange and is a constituent of the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 Index. It operates in over 40 countries, employs over 80,000 people and is the fifth largest bank in Europe by total assets[19].

The programme

LifeSkills is funded by Barclays as part of its commitment to corporate social responsibility and environmental, social and governance. The programme is funded by Barclays via its citizenship programme, and responsibility for running it sits within the Citizenship team at Barclays. It is an employability programme, using a broad definition of 'employability', that supports people in getting work; essentially, the programme aims to give people the skills and experience they need to be successful in work and in wider society. The programme started in 2013 and since then, there have been 16 million participants.

Participants

LifeSkills is primarily a youth programme for those aged under 25, although there is also some content aimed at vulnerable adults, i.e. those needing assistance with money management, and those looking to change careers or become self-employed. Barclays works mainly with schools and colleges to assist younger people, and with local authorities and housing associations to identify adults who could benefit from the programme. In addition, the company funds other charities that support people who encounter barriers in life, such as the Prince's Trust.

Unlike programmes that focus mainly on disadvantaged young people, LifeSkills provides resources that are appropriate for children of all ages, young adults, and their parents/guardians. The LifeSkills website[20] makes this clear: 'Whether you're at school, college or Uni, you just graduated, or you're looking for your first job, LifeSkills is here to help'. Young people, and anyone who works with young people, can download and use content from the website: primary and secondary school teachers, youth workers, young people themselves, and their parents and guardians. The programme is run primarily in educational environments (with input and guidance from educators) or online (where young people can work through resources themselves, independently or with help from a parent/guardian).

Several different methods are used to reach out to potential participants:

- There has been a TV advertisement for every year that the programme has existed, run by Barclays central marketing.
- There are also frequent emails to educators in schools; an education agency supports Barclays in communications to schools and colleges.
- Emails also go to many different clubs that are registered, e.g. boxing and football clubs.
- Around 90% of secondary schools are registered with the programme.

Content

When LifeSkills started, Barclays looked at the approximately one million young people who were NEET and assessed where their skills shortfall was, and how to bridge the gap between leaving education and entering employment: what,

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[18] https://home.barclays
[19] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barclays
[20] https://barclayslifeskills.com

according to employers, were the skills that were lacking in young people? The programme has monitored this and adapted accordingly over the years, and aims to support educators, talk to businesses, and knitting these together.

The eight 'Gatsby Benchmarks' (listed below)[21] have been important in designing the LifeSkills programme, especially the content for schools and colleges. These eight benchmarks were developed on behalf of the Gatsby Foundation by Sir John Holman, and provide a framework for organising careers provision in schools and colleges. The benchmarks are enshrined in statutory guidance, and cover:

1. A stable careers programme.
2. Learning from careers and labour market information.
3. Addressing the needs of each student.
4. Linking curriculum learning to careers.
5. Encounters with employers and employees.
6. Experiences of workplaces.
7. Encounters with further and higher education.
8. Personal guidance.

The material for schools and clubs is aimed at young people ranging in age from seven to 24 although, as mentioned above, there is some content for adults. The education agency that supports Barclays with communications to schools also helps with content development, and ensures the content is anchored in the curriculum.

A tool that can be used for both young people and adults, assisted by input from parents, teachers etc., is the 'Wheel of Strengths'[22] which firstly helps people develop their self-awareness about their skills, interests and personality traits, and secondly matches up these aspects with a range of job roles.

A wide variety of material is available to young people and their teachers, parents, guardians and youth workers:

- Skills for seeking and getting work: composing a CV, covering letters and LinkedIn profiles (with interactive material on CV building), and practising the types of assessment tests that are often used by employers.
- Interview skills (again, with interactive material on being interviewed so participants can practise).
- Identifying skills, via interactive challenges to help identify and develop personal skills, using the 'Wheel of Strengths', together with advice on selling these skills to employers.
- Managing finances and budgets, including (for older students) managing debt and independent living.
- Improving core transferable skills such as resilience and creativity.
- Improving personal skills such as social interaction, self-understanding, esteem building (understanding own self-worth) and confidence-building, all aimed at helping people become a rounded individual.

Material for adults also focuses on employability, financial education and recognising/developing strengths, presented in a slightly different way so it is more appropriate for adults.

The LifeSkills materials are free to participants and are completely open source, with no application process and no assessment of participants; as the programme is run primarily in educational environments, however, it is likely that teachers make an assessment of which materials are appropriate to meet the needs of different groups of young people at different ages.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was also a work experience element to the LifeSkills programme. This was varied in terms of success, partly because Barclays has such a wide geographical spread that work experience was not available consistently in all areas; the quality of placements also varied. When the pandemic halted face-to-face work experience, Barclays worked with an external company to develop an online work experience, i.e. virtual sessions for young people who work together on a project.

Delivery

Much of the material (including lesson plans) is taught in class by teachers after being downloaded from the LifeSkills website. In addition, a lot of young people register directly with the programme via the website, to work on materials online; 44% of these say they have been referred by their teacher.

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[21] More information about the Gatsby Benchmarks can be found here: https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/focus-areas/good-career-guidance.

[22] The Wheel of Strengths can be accessed at www.barclayslifeskills.com/i-want-to-choose-my-next-step/college/wheel-of-strengths and www.barclayslifeskills.com/i-want-to-choose-my-next-step/school/wheel-of-strengths although the enquirer needs to register with the LifeSkills programme in order to do this.

Barclays also works with charity partners to run face-to-face workshops in schools; the charity partners run face-to-face sessions four times a year. Colleagues at Barclays are encouraged to support these sessions, or indeed run their own skills-based sessions. Colleagues are given two days a year to do this, and it is a very popular thing to do.

Measuring effectiveness

There are several key performance indicators based on success factors:

- Scale: The target here is to achieve one million young people participating every year. To date, LifeSkills has achieved over 16 million participants.
- Impact: This is considered very important. It is independently evaluated every year by the Chrysalis research agency (prior to that, the Work Foundation). The focus is on the impact on individuals who participate, and the impact on the wider system. There are questions about confidence in managing money, for example, and confidence in the future.
- There are also additional measures around the brand.

Some statistics on the website give examples of the findings of external evaluations, although none of these are recent:

- 82% of students rated LifeSkills resources as good or very good, and 85% agreed LifeSkills helped them feel better prepared to make future career decisions (*2017 LifeSkills Impact Report*).
- 71% of young people said LifeSkills helped them feel more confident at interview (*Online survey conducted by The Work Foundation, 2015*).
- 73% of young people said the LifeSkills financial tips helped them save money (*Online survey conducted by The Work Foundation, 2015*).
- 70% of secondary schools and 74% of further education colleges (18,000 educators) are taking part (*LifeSkills programme data, July 2015*).
- 94% of teachers who used the LifeSkills resources said they were likely to use them again, and 85% said they were likely to recommend LifeSkills to colleagues (*Online survey conducted by The Work Foundation 2015*).
- In the first two years of LifeSkills, the company secured over 24,000 work experience opportunities and 1,200 traineeship placements for young people (*LifeSkills programme data, July 2015, and LifeSkills Second Year Impact Report, July 2015*).

Relevance to Defence

Although many of the LifeSkills materials have been designed with secondary school students in mind, there is also a lot of content aimed at older students, including university students who are moving away from home and to independent living, and young people who are leaving education and seeking employment. These broader employability, self-knowledge and independence skills are relevant to any age group and particularly relevant to those who are in the process of transitioning from one environment/employer to another.

Barclays has a military and veterans outreach team that aims to deliver on the Armed Forces Covenant via an employability programme, the direct recruitment of veterans, banking products and services that are Armed Forces friendly, and a mentoring programme. Although the LifeSkills programme is currently not used for veterans, the Barclays military and veterans outreach team is talking to the CTP to find out how the company can better support early Service leavers (usually young adults) using the LifeSkills materials.

Sources

This case study draws on material gathered from:

- the Barclays website: https://home.barclays (accessed in February 2023);
- the Barclays LifeSkills website: https://barclayslifeskills.com (accessed in August and November 2022); and
- discussions with the LifeSkills programme manager in August 2022, supplemented by input from the manager of the military and veterans outreach team in November 2022.

Life Skills Case Study 4: Novus

The organisation

Novus is a provider of education services to prisons and young offender institutions, and has been carrying out this role for almost 30 years. Specifically, Novus has been commissioned as the education provider at 43 adult men's and

women's prisons across England under the Prison Education Framework contract; at two privately operated adult men's prisons; and at three Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs)[23]. As part of Novus Cambria, a joint venture with Coleg Cambria, Novus also delivers learning and skills at His Majesty's Prison Berwyn Wales. The company works with a range of other organisations to deliver its services: the Ministry of Justice, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, the Youth Custody Service, the private security companies G4S[24] and MTC[25] Security Ltd, national, devolved and local governments, charities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and employers.

Novus is part of the Learning, Training & Employment Group, a UK social enterprise dedicated to improving lives and economic success through learning and skills.

The programme

The education services delivered by Novus aim to equip prisoners and young offenders with Life Skills that will help them turn their lives around when their sentence ends, primarily by gaining employment. There is a focus on basic maths, English and digital skills, as these are considered essential for the majority of jobs; some vocational training is available, too, for example in catering. Recognising that many members of the prison population have failed to engage effectively with education in the past and are vulnerable, with poor social skills, opportunities are also provided for 'soft' skills development in areas such as communication, emotional intelligence and self-awareness. These soft skills are particularly important for younger people in YOIs, who are particularly likely to have come from troubled backgrounds and to be in need of confidence-building and the skills necessary to make sound decisions.

Participants

Over 80,000 people are currently in prisons or YOIs in England and Wales[26]. Many are trapped in cycles of re-offending that have significant costs for communities and society, for themselves as individuals, and for their families. Employment is seen as a key factor in rehabilitation and reducing the risk of re-offending, and taking part in prison education has been shown to increase the likelihood of gaining employment on release; this helps the prisoner and has a positive impact on their families and communities. According to Novus's website, the company engages with over 60,000 learners in these prisons and YOIs. No detail is provided, however, about the ways in which Novus engages with potential participants, for example to persuade them to sign up for education, or to help them decide which course(s) to choose.

Content

Provision is under six broad headings, according to the company's website:

- **English, maths and digital skills**: Novus delivers English and maths education in prisons and YOIs from Entry Level 1 to Level 3, and there are opportunities to progress beyond. This also includes specialist provision in English for Speakers of Other Languages. Less specific information is available about digital skills, although the website mentions 'digitally-enabled provision' and transferable digital skills.
- **Vocational and technical education**: Novus's vocational and technical prison education provision includes 'vocational training programmes, short courses, taster courses, training workshops and experience-building opportunities for adult offenders, delivered by skilled and experienced tutors and trainers who are experts in their field'. Learners 'work towards nationally recognised qualifications' such as catering National Vocational Qualifications Level 1 and Level 2.
- **Higher level and distance learning**: In partnership with the Open University, the Prisoners' Education Trust and local colleges and universities, learners have been helped to achieve a variety of qualifications, from humanities to interior design degrees.
- **Progression and career pathways**: Learners are assisted to seek employment via Novus's knowledge of local labour markets and the expectations of local and national employers; this supports learners to make realistic and informed career choices. The company works collaboratively with learners to plan their learning and work activities around the skills and experience they will need to gain employment in their chosen area of work. This 'Personal Learning Plan' contains the educational and technical qualification requirements of their career pathway, alongside the soft skills employers look for, to boost their employability and get them ready for the world of work. A range of support is provided: the preparation of CVs, job searching and applications, guidance

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[23] Young Offenders Institutions are for young people aged 15 to 21.

[24] Previously Group 4 Securicor.

[25] MTC does not appear to be an abbreviation of a longer name.

[26] As at June 2022, the prison population in England and Wales was 80,660 (UK Prison Population Statistics, Research Briefing, published by the House of Commons Library on 25 October 2022).

on disclosure, interview preparation and practice. Via 'Novus Works' (in partnership with over 200 socially engaged employers), learners have access to local and regional job opportunities, apprenticeships and training on release.

- **Enrichment and engagement**: Many of Novus's learners have had difficult experiences of interpersonal relationships and formal classroom education. The programmes and courses in creative arts, enrichment and personal and social development help learners to: improve their self-knowledge; develop self-confidence; adopt appropriate behaviour and attitudes; improve interpersonal skills and relationships; and encourage learning.
- **Support**: Additional support is available for those who might find learning difficult, such as adapted training materials for the neurodiverse such as those with dyslexia.

Delivery

The majority of training and education is face-to-face, for a variety of reasons: many individuals require a lot of personal attention, access to computers by prisoners is limited, and digital literacy (or indeed literacy in general) can be low. However, distance learning is also available for some types of education, such as Open University courses. Where possible and appropriate, classroom training is supplemented by work experience provided by the 'Novus Works' employers. This is very important because, as described on Novus's website, finding employment with a criminal conviction can feel near-impossible. The Novus Works partners sign up to an employer charter which commits them to, among other things, support prisoners' re-integration by enabling flexible working arrangements during their resettlement and adopting practices that help people with mental health support needs to excel in the workplace. These employers also provide feedback to Novus on all aspects of delivery, including learner/candidate feedback.

Measuring effectiveness

The website does not provide any information about how Novus judges and measures its effectiveness with regard to the provision of prison education. There are, however, several 'success stories' of individuals who have managed to gain qualifications and employment and are very positive about both the education and support they received while in custody, and the opportunities their employers gave them by offering them a job.

Relevance to Defence

Ex-offenders and Armed Forces personnel are clearly two very different groups of people. There are some parallels with Defence, however, in that prisoners who come to the end of their sentence, and Armed Forces leavers, both emerge from a structured environment and require a variety of Life Skills in order to function independently and fend for themselves. In addition, ex-offenders and Armed Forces veterans, even when well-qualified, can find it difficult to gain suitable employment; civilian employers typically seek not only educational and vocational qualifications, but also softer skills requiring self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Finally, this case study demonstrates the importance of employers who will give people an opportunity of working for them, even if they do not necessarily have experience in their area of work.

Source

This case study has been written using material from the Novus website www.novus.ac.uk (accessed in August and December 2022).

Life Skills Case Study 5: BT Skills for Tomorrow

The organisation

BT Group is the UK's leading provider of fixed and mobile telecommunications and related secure digital products, solutions and services. BT also provides managed telecommunications, security and network and IT infrastructure services to customers across 180 countries. As the world's oldest communications company, BT Group can trace its roots back to The Electric Telegraph Company, founded in 1846; this company was the first to develop a nationwide communications network.

The company's purpose is 'we connect for good'. As part of this, BT Group is committed to diversity and inclusion in its widest sense, including operating social impact solutions aimed at levelling up work skills in communities. The company allocates funding to socially responsible programmes each year, wherever possible aligning these programmes with its business activities and outcomes so that the work of these programmes is relevant to the business. BT believes the lives of many people would improve with increased connectivity and digital skills, citing the

statistics that around 2.6 million people in the UK remain almost completely offline and nearly 11 million lack basic digital skills.

A piece of work in 2022 to 'sanity check' BT's activities used the question, 'What are the interventions that BT has available, across the life stages of a person?' This has led to the company's offers being put into four broad groups: families and children; job seekers and digital skills; SMEs; and older people/people with additional needs. The strategy has developed since then and some programmes have evolved, or been replaced, however this case study focuses on the initial iteration of the Skills for Tomorrow programme and three of its sub-programmes, Fast Futures, Small Business Support, and Work Ready.

Skills for Tomorrow

The programme

Skills for Tomorrow, which launched in 2020, had the overall aim of providing people of all ages with the confidence and skills to make the most of life with regard to digital, is a key example of the activities funded by BT's corporate social responsibility programme. Skills for Tomorrow has offered digital resources relevant to home and work life with the aim of improving digital competence.

Participants

Mostly, participants self-referred; the Skills for Tomorrow activities/courses are completely open and free of charge. Jobcentre Plus would often point people to these resources, to help them improve their digital skills. To maximise participation for its offers aimed at a wide audience, BT ran mass media campaigns.

Content

Content and strategy are continuously evolving but at launch of the programme a wide variety of activities were available to participants, and these have changed/evolved over time. When the Skills for Tomorrow web pages[27] were accessed in 2022, the following were offered:

'Home life' contained:
- Activities for children: 26 varied puzzles and activities on different topics from children aged 4 to 11, plus a guide to computational thinking for parents.
- Basics for beginners: 21 courses and resources on different topics such as managing bank accounts, and 'how to' guides on GP services online, the NHS app and using public services online.
- Digital wellbeing: eight courses and resources aimed particularly at helping parents to support and advise their children when online.
- Online safety: 21 courses and resources aimed at keeping people and their families safe when online.

'Work life' contained:
- Launching a business: 23 courses on various topics, such as how to launch a business, using data to grow your business, using influencers to engage with customers, building an effective network, and branding.
- Promoting a business: 19 courses (some of them also included in 'launching a business'), including designing and delivering great customer experience, and growing your business with social media.
- Getting a job: 23 courses and resources on different topics, such as choosing a career, searching for a job, interviews, preparing for selection exercises, building a CV, and dealing with rejection.

Delivery

Delivery of the Skills for Tomorrow materials was entirely online and open to all; participants worked through the activities and courses at their own pace. The 'work life' offerings included webinars, which required participants to register and provide a small amount of demographic information. In recent months, some face-to-face programmes have been launched.

Measuring effectiveness

The overarching framework for assessing effectiveness, used is 'Reach + Quality + Impact = Value'. Reach was a key indicator of success for Skills for Tomorrow, because the programme aimed to maximise participation among the UK population. According to the website, 14.7 million people have been helped to develop their digital skills since 2014, and there is a target to reach 25 million by 2026.

FastFutures

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[27] www.bt.com/skillsfortomorrow

The programme

FastFutures is a study programme for young people aged 18 to 24. This programme is run in collaboration with other companies, with BT currently being the lead sponsor. It aims to reach a diverse young audience in order to develop their digital skills and identify digital talent, and ultimately to boost the digital talent pipeline for BT and the UK by providing possible recruits from diverse backgrounds for the sponsoring companies.

Participants

To reach young people who might be suitable participants, a variety of outreach partners are used, including Jobcentre Plus, charities and influencers. To get onto the FastFutures programme, participants do a short assessment which is based on behaviours, attitudes and mind-sets (rather than existing qualifications).

Content

The programme provides participants with ten hours' study per week for six weeks, covering five modules: finance, digital marketing, data, teamwork and innovation. The content is delivered through a mix of live webinars, panel discussions with business leaders, self-driven learning, and group work.

BT also funded the development of a 'Digital Accelerator Bootcamp' for FastFutures alumni, designed to build advanced digital, data and AI skills without the need for a degree in a STEM subject (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

To support participants while on the programme, learners are matched with a mentor; BT provides many volunteers for this, as do the other companies that are involved.

Delivery

The FastFutures modules are delivered online.

Measuring effectiveness

The following indicators measure volume, quality and success for the business:

- 7,000 young people have completed the Fast Futures programme since it began in 2020 (with over 300 of these being mentored by BT colleagues).
- In addition to completions, the following are monitored: the number of starts, the completion rate (% of starters to finish the course), participant feedback at the end, and how quickly participants gain employment (although this last indicator can be hard to track).
- Eighty young people have been supported through the Digital Accelerator Bootcamp.
- The number of BT joiners from the Fast Futures programme is considered a good indicator of success, as it contributes to recruitment and to BT's diversity efforts.
- BT also tracks the impact of Fast Futures, alongside other programmes, on its brand reputation.

Work Ready

The programme

Work Ready is a UK-wide training programme aimed at young people who are NEET; it is delivered in and near local BT, EE and PlusNet contact centres. The company works with the NEET population to look at their employability needs and build their confidence and expectations so they can get a job and break the 'no experience - no job' cycle.

The background to BT's current work is that it started in 2014, when BT chose to take part in the Government Traineeship programme[28]. The company worked with local job centres, offering traineeships lasting between six and eight weeks. The content included CV and interview skills, shadowing, and general business skills such as finance and using Microsoft Office software. BT then decided to stop drawing down government funding and set up its own scheme, offering participants two to three weeks, although still working with local job centres near where BT offices are based, especially where young people were struggling most.

BT's current projects focus on the communities local to its workplaces; the company works with NEETs and others claiming Jobseekers Allowance, and also with schools, where BT employees volunteer to go in to deliver skills for work training. Post lockdown, BT's activities with NEETs have been geared to getting young people into work with the company. There are one-day activities and some six-day activities.

Participants

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[28] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/employers-urged-to-take-on-trainees

To reach potential participants, rather than putting out a lot of advertising BT worked with a variety of outreach partners: job centres, charities and grass roots organisations in local communities, such as clubs and other community projects. During lockdown, when face-to-face activities were not possible, social media was used to publicise the company's webinar programme. Participants are mainly 16- to 30-year-old NEETs, i.e. young people who are facing barriers to work.

People who apply for a frontline role through BT's careers website are invited to an event if one is running in their area. There is no formal application process to join the programme, and there are no criteria to be met, apart from asking people to declare if they have a criminal conviction; this does not prevent them from taking part in an event, but might impact an application to work in certain areas of the business. BT also asks people to tell them about any form of learning disability that might need additional support. Activities are run on weekdays, so participants tend to be out of work, or may work part time.

BT also runs five-hour workshops in secondary schools and colleges, with the aim of preventing young people entering the NEET cycle; BT volunteers work with children from the age of eleven, to give them guidance and help them decide about the sort of work they could do and set goals to get there including further education, apprenticeships, and direct entry into the workforce.

In addition to the programme and workshops, during lockdown webinars on topics such as applying for a job, being interviewed, and building a CV were open to people of all ages, around the globe.

The programme and the workshops are free to participants and are funded by BT's corporate social responsibility programme; during lockdown, the webinars were also freely available.

Content

At the start, when BT was part of the government programme, content was developed in the required areas of the six-to-eight-week traineeship programme, i.e. employability, skills for the workplace and work experience. The company also looked at the skills its own employees needed, and carried out research to find out whether young people are getting the skills they need for entering work. The company has continued to do this, to ensure its programmes are up to date, and operates a participant feedback programme to continuously improve its content.

Life Skills is a very broad term; for its work with NEETs, BT focuses on employability skills to prepare people for work rather than the skills people might need, for example, for independent living. Broadly, the programme goes through the employability life cycle, from 'I have no idea what I want to do' to 'I'm resilient if I don't get the job I apply for'. This includes self-analysis, drawing on interests, understanding what's important and choosing an employer on matched values, deciphering a job description, completing an application, writing a CV, being interviewed or assessed via an assessment centre, and being resilient if unsuccessful. Activities in specific areas are also offered such as digital skills training, job shadowing and work experience. The full ten-day programme includes:

- Growth mind-set.
- Team-building.
- Soft skills.
- Hard skills.
- Transferable skills.
- Customer service skills.
- Facing fears and gaining confidence.
- Researching a company and its values.
- Creative digital skills for today's workplace.
- Breaking down job descriptions.
- Goal-setting.
- Face-to-face networking and self-presentation.
- Job shadowing.
- Mock assessment centre day.

During the life span of a course, the course leader supports participants. There will typically be between eight and ten people on a workshop, with the aim of getting people into a job, and support is offered between the course and the interview.

In addition to the employability workshops to prepare young people for work, five-hour workshops for students aged 11 to 19 focused on young people's interests and helped them think about possible future careers, encouraging them to consider working in engineering, innovation and technology industries. The workshops:

- Gave young people the opportunity to explore their individuality, skills and interests via group activities and challenges such as 'practise summarising yourself'.
- Helped schools to deliver their careers education by aligning with the Gatsby Benchmarks29 and taking account of the quality standards used by Ofsted.

Delivery

The majority of the Work Ready events are for front-line services: contact centres (speaking or digital) or engineering activities through Openreach. Participants are given job shadowing opportunities, during which they get to talk to people doing particular jobs, and observe them. A small amount of work experience/training in customer service is also given, as this is felt to be a skill that everyone needs at work.

Except for the online programme during lockdown, all BT's delivery to 16- to 30-year-olds is face-to-face. For schools and colleges, delivery is also face-to-face, although BT also operated a post-lockdown transition phase for students where online sessions were offered to schools while people regained their confidence in meeting and travelling. The reason for using face-to-face delivery is that the company finds it more effective, especially as a key goal is to enable participants to see workplaces; here, participants and BT employees can meet each other, and participants can decide whether they want to apply to work for the company.

Measuring effectiveness

- Getting people into employment with BT is a key measure of success for Work Ready. To this end, the company offers an interview to everyone who wants one, as long as they have attended and worked through the activities; participants do not have to go through the application process in order to get this interview. Since November 2021, 278 young people have gained an apprenticeship within BT's frontline services.
- Volume is a key performance indicator, i.e. the number of people on the Work Ready programmes. Before lockdown, 3,300 young people participated in these programmes, and since November 2021, over 350 young people have attended workplace events to learn digital and employability skills.
- During lockdown, some 33,000 people worked through the Work Ready virtual training sessions.
- At the end of every event, participants complete feedback forms to enable BT to assess the success of the event and ways to improve.
- BT has conducted over 185 workshops reaching 4,900 pupils aged between 11 and 19.
- BT currently partners with 'Movement to Work', an organisation dedicated to breaking the 'no experience, no job' cycle. They measure demographics such as ethnicity, disability, free school meals, and coming out of the care system, for BT's diversity and inclusion statistics.
- Work Ready is an award-winning programme, in terms of innovation and impact, and BT is well-known at the Department for Work and Pensions for its employability offers.

Small Business Support

The programme

The Small Business Support programme is for SMEs. It aims to help SMEs maximise their online presence and use digital technology effectively within their businesses to increase connectivity, cash flow and confidence.

Participants

Anyone who is self-employed (including those considering whether, and how, to set up their own business), or who owns, manages or works in a SME can use BT's resources and participate in its activities and webinars. BT attracts potential participants via its website and LinkedIn.

Content

There are online activities, courses and webinars. One-to-one mentoring is offered using volunteers from within BT and other companies.

Delivery

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29 The eight 'Gatsby Benchmarks', developed on behalf of the Gatsby Foundation, provide a framework for organising careers provision in schools and colleges. The benchmarks are enshrined in statutory guidance. For further detail, see the Barclays LifeSkills case study.

All content was online/virtual but in recent months the programme has evolved to also include in person events. To amplify our work and increase our reach, BT is participating in national campaigns such as the national StartUp Awards[30], the Small Business Saturday tour[31], and running tactical activities spread across the UK such as the Netwalks[32].

Measuring effectiveness

Volume is an important indicator: over 550,000 SMEs and their employees have been upskilled via BT's digital skills programmes since 2019.

There are specific indicators for webinars, namely the number of people who join, the length of time they stay (e.g. how many are still there two-thirds of the way through), and the number of people joining more than one webinar.

Relevance to Defence

Although BT Skills for Tomorrow and its associated programmes are not badged as improving 'Life Skills', many of the materials and training on offer are highly relevant. Digital skills, for example, are key to obtaining employment in many sectors of the labour market, and small business support would be very helpful to Armed Forces leavers who may wish to be self-employed. The practical advice offered by 'how to' guides, such as GP services online, the NHS app and using public services online, could also be very useful to Armed Forces families, especially those moving to a new geographical area. Younger Armed Forces leavers (those under 30) who are uncertain about their career direction might benefit from joining a Work Ready programme.

Sources

This case study has been written using material from:

- the BT Skills for Tomorrow web pages (www.bt.com/skillsfortomorrow), accessed in August and December 2022;
- an interview with the manager of the Fast Futures programme at BT on 31st August 2022;
- an interview with the Education and Employability Programmes Manager on 11th January 2023; and
- a factsheet provided by BT in February 2023.

The case study was reviewed by BT prior to its inclusion in this report.

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[30] These awards, supported by BT, recognise the achievements of entrepreneurs who take the risk of turning their ideas into new products or services.

[31] Small Business Saturday UK is a grassroots, non-commercial campaign that highlights small business success and encourages consumers to 'shop local'; BT supports the campaign's UK roadshow, The Tour.

[32] The Netwalks are monthly walks in 15 locations in the UK for small business owners to join, ending at an independently-owned coffee shop; they aim to encourage networking and promote positive mental health.

Appendix D – Evaluation Models/ Frameworks

The evidence review identified seven existing methods or approaches that have been developed for the evaluation of Learning and Development Programmes. An overview of the each model/approach and its corresponding advantages and disadvantages are outlined in Table 9-1 below.

Table 9-1: Evaluation Models and Frameworks

	Learning and Performance Maturity Model	Kirkpatrick Model	Phillips Return on Investment Methodology	Brinkerhoff Success Case Method	Weinbauer-Heidel's Levers of Transfer Effectiveness	Thalheimer's Learning Transfer Evaluation Model	Relevance, Alignment, Measurement Model	Learning and Performance Maturity Model
Definition	A framework that helps organisations assess their level of maturity in learning and performance. The Learning and Performance Maturity Model consists of four levels, each representing a higher degree of maturity.	A framework to evaluate the effectiveness of training programmes and a widely used method to measure the impact of training initiatives.	A framework for measuring the return on investment of training and development initiatives. Building upon the Kirkpatrick Model, it adds a fifth level, the financial impact of the training. This level is often considered the most important.	A criticism of Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model is that performance changes cannot solely be linked to learning. The Brinkerhoff Success Case Method addresses this challenge by proposing a wider focus.	This framework is designed to help organisations improve the effectiveness of learning transfer, which is the process of applying the knowledge and skills learnt in a training programme to the job.	This framework aims to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development programmes based on the degree of transfer of learning to job performance.	This framework was developed as a direct challenge to the perceived overuse of the Kirkpatrick Model. It looks to address three simple issues and focuses only on the eventual outcomes of training and development.	
Content	**Foundational:** The organisation has just begun to implement learning and performance initiatives. At this level, there is a limited focus on learning and development, and training is often	**Reaction:** Measures how the learners react to the training. It includes feedback forms and surveys that assess the participant's satisfaction with the training.	**Reaction:** Measures the participants' reactions to the training. **Learning:** Measures the participants' knowledge or skills acquired	A Success Case Method evaluation involves finding the following cases: **Success cases:** Individuals or teams have benefited from the learning. Typically come from a survey,	12 levers of transfer effectiveness to identify the key factors that can influence learning transfer from training to the workplace. The 12 levers are as follows: 1. Trainee Characteristics: This lever focusses on the personal characteristics of the trainee, such as their motivation, ability, and previous knowledge, which	It is divided into 8 tiers and colour coded to work as a kind of barometer using a traffic light system: green shows which methods are most useful in validating learning results,	**Relevance:** How existing or planned learning provision will meet new opportunities and challenges for the business.	

reactive to individual needs.

Developing: The organisation is starting to establish a more comprehensive learning strategy on developing employees' skills and knowledge, and training programmes are more structured and formalised.

Mature: The organisation has a well-established learning and performance strategy, with a strong focus on aligning learning objectives with business goals. Training programmes are well-designed and integrated with other HR processes.

Advanced: The organisation has a culture of continuous learning, and training and is seen as an integral part of achieving business goals. Learning and performance initiatives are regularly evaluated and

Learning: Measures how much knowledge or skills the learners have acquired during the training. It includes tests and assessments that evaluate participants' understanding of the content.

Behaviour: Measures how much the learners' behaviour has changed as a result of the training. It includes observation and feedback from supervisors, peers, or customers.

Results: Measures the impact of the training on the organisation. It includes metrics such as productivity, sales, and customer satisfaction.

during the training.

Behaviour: Measures the extent to which the participants apply the learning on the job.

Results: Measures the impact of the training on the organisation.

Return on investment: measures the financial return on investment of the training programme, by comparing the costs of the programme to the financial benefits that were generated.

performance reports, organisational data, or the 'information grapevine'. Those representing potential 'success cases' are interviewed and 'screened' to determine if they really represent verifiable success with supporting evidence from other parties. Factors that contribute to success beyond the learning intervention are also explored.

Non-success cases: Discover those who have found little or no value in learning; explore the reasons why learning can be very illuminating.

A Success Case Method evaluation involves asking four questions:

- How well does an organisation use learning to improve performance?

can influence their ability to transfer what they have learnt to the workplace.

2. Training Design: This lever refers to the design of the training programme, including its content, delivery methods, and the level of practice and feedback provided, which can affect the transfer of learning.

3. Work Environment: This lever is related to organisational and environmental factors on the workplace that can support or hinder the transfer of learning, such as job demands, resources, and culture.

4. Supervisor Support: This lever emphasises the role of supervisors in providing support and reinforcement for the application of new knowledge and skills on the job.

5. Peer support: This lever focusses on the role of peers in providing feedback, coaching, and social support to reinforce learning transfer.

6. Self-Regulation: This lever refers to the trainee's ability to regulate his own learning and apply the knowledge and skills learnt on the job.

7. Goal-Setting: This lever emphasises the importance of setting specific, challenging, and

while red shows those which are inadequate in measuring learning. The eight tiers are as follows:

1. Learner Readiness: The learner's readiness to transfer learning to the job is assessed.

2. Pre-Training Support: The level of support provided to learners before training begins is evaluated.

3. Training Design: The quality and effectiveness of the training programme are assessed.

4. Training Transfer: The level of support provided to learners during and after the training programme is evaluated to transfer learning to the job.

Alignment: If the learning and development strategy takes an integrated blended approach, it is critical for learning and development professionals to work with stakeholders on their performance needs and how to achieve them. Aligning with broader organisational strategy gives focus, purpose, and relevance to learning and development.

Measurement: Learning and development teams effectively and consistently measure the impact, engagement, and transfer of learning activities as

improved upon, and there is a focus on developing leadership and talent within the organisation. Each level represents an increased level of learning and performance maturity in an organisation. The model helps organisations identify their current level of maturity and identify areas for improvement to advance to the next level.			• What organisational processes/resources are in place to support performance improvement? • What needs to be improved? • What organisational barriers stand in the way of performance improvement? • Following the analysis, the success and non-success stories are shared.	achievable goals to support the transfer of learning. 8. Transfer Climate: This lever refers to the extent to which the organisation and its leaders support and value the transfer of learning to the job. 9. Transfer Incentives: This lever is related to the use of rewards and recognition to motivate and reinforce the transfer of learning to work. 10. Performance Feedback: This lever emphasises the importance of providing regular and constructive feedback to employees on their performance related to the transfer of learning. 11. Continuous Learning: This lever focusses on the importance of ongoing learning and development to reinforce and sustain the transfer of learning over time. 12. Evaluation: This lever refers to the use of evaluation and measurement to assess the effectiveness of the training programme and the transfer of knowledge to the workplace.	5. Application Opportunities: The extent to which learners have the opportunity to apply what they have learnt on the job is assessed. 6. Performance Support: The level of support provided to learners on the job to reinforce and sustain learning is evaluated. 7. Manager Support: The level of support provided by managers to their employees to transfer learning to work is assessed. 8. Evaluation: The effectiveness of the entire learning transfer process is evaluated to determine the return on investment.	part of the evaluation process. It may be helpful to use a mixture of evaluation methods and broader measures of expected change and improvement, such as return on expectation, and to link learning and development outcomes to key performance indicators.
Application Context	Can be applied to any organisation or industry that values learning and development as a key	A simple and straightforward way for organisations to measure the impact of their training	Often used in corporate training and development programmes, but it can be applied	It can be applied in a variety of contexts where success can be defined or measured.	Any organisational context where the goal is to maximize the transfer of learning from training to the job.	It is applicable in various contexts where training or learning interventions are	The application context of the Relevance, Alignment, Measurement

	aspect of their business strategy. This model is especially useful for organisations that want to assess the effectiveness of their current learning and development programmes and identify opportunities to improve.	programmes on learners and on the business as a whole. Often used in corporate training and development programmes, but it can be applied to any type of training initiative.	to any type of training initiative where there is a need to evaluate the financial impact of the training.				provided, such as corporate training, education, and development programmes.	approach is in organisational settings where Learning and Development Programmes are implemented. It is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing organisations to apply it to a wide range of issues.
Advantages	• Provides a structured approach to assessing learning and performance maturity in an organisation. • Helps identify areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement in their learning and development programmes. • Used to benchmark progress over time and track improvements in learning and	• Helps organisations measure the success of their training initiatives. • Emphasises the importance of evaluating training at multiple levels, which can provide a more comprehensive picture of its impact.	• Provides a clear and tangible measure of the financial return on investment of training initiatives, which can help organisations make informed decisions about future training investments. • Emphasises the importance of measuring	• Focusses on identifying and analysing successful cases, which can provide valuable insight into the factors that contribute to success. • Offer a manageable, cost-effective approach to determine success and improvement insights.	• Comprehensive approach: The 12 levers cover a range of factors that can influence the transfer of learning, allowing for a more holistic approach to designing and implementing training programmes. • Evidence-based: The framework is based on research on what factors are most likely to impact learning transfer, increasing the likelihood of success. • Flexibility: The framework can be adapted to fit the specific needs and goals of different organisations and training programmes.	It provides a structured approach to assess learning transfer, helping identify areas of improvement in training programmes, and promoting the use of evidence-based practises.	Simplicity and speed, as it helps organisations quickly identify and address workplace issues	

	development efforts.		the financial impact of training, which can be a persuasive argument for stakeholders.				
Disadvantages	• Focused solely on learning and development, which may not capture the full scope of an organisation's development efforts. • Implementing the model may require significant time and resources, especially at higher levels of maturity.	• Time-consuming and resource-intensive to implement. • Attention tends to be focused on evaluation of learning at the reaction level due to the time costs of measuring the other three levels. • Changes in performance cannot solely be linked to the particular learning methods/approaches. • Each level is not interlinked.	• Complex and resource-intensive to implement. • Can be challenging to collect accurate data on the financial benefits generated by a training programme.	• Success Case Method is not a comprehensive evaluation method due to the nature of the sampling. • May be less useful in contexts where success is difficult to define or measure.	• Complexity: The 12 Levers framework can be complex and difficult to apply for those without extensive training and expertise in instructional design or organisational development. • Resource-intensive: Implementing the framework may require significant time and resources, such as conducting assessments, collecting data, and designing customised training programs. • Potential limitations: While the framework is evidence-based, there may be limitations in the research upon which it is based, and not all factors may be relevant or equally important in all contexts.	• The complexity of the model and the time and resources required to implement it effectively. • The model may not capture all factors that influence learning transfer, and its results may be limited by the quality of data collected and the validity of the evaluation tools used.	The Relevance, Alignment, Measurement approach focusses on the outcome, rather than the response to a learning event (the focus of most 'happy sheets').
Sources	Thompson (2004); Wagenstein (2006); Towards Maturity (2018); Kineo (2022); Acorn (2022).	Kirkpatrick (2015); Tamkin, Yarnall & Kerrin (2002); Bates (2004); CIPD (2022).	Phillips & Phillips (2011); CIPD (2022).	Brinkerhoff (2005); CIPD (2022).	Weinbauer-Heidel & Ibeschitz-Manderbach (2018); CIPD (2022).	Thalheimer (2018); CIPD (2022).	CIPD (2022).

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