

# Policy Summary: A Whole Family Approach to Transition

The [Understanding the Transition from Military to Civilian Life report](#) (2025) provides a comprehensive review of how Service leavers and families navigate the transition from military to civilian life. Whilst most Armed Forces families make a successful transition and adapt well to civilian life, some do not. Transition is not simply a matter for the Service leaver. Families also undergo transition and can experience disruption when leaving behind military structures and adjusting to civilian life. This report estimated the total cost of poor transition to the government and third sector in 2025 to be approximately £258m<sup>1</sup>.

Families make a significant contribution to our Armed Forces, playing a vital role in operational effectiveness, retention and morale. It is therefore integral that families are effectively supported both during and after service. This requires a whole family approach to policy and support that recognises and meets the needs of modern Armed Forces families.

The report highlights that progress has been made to recognise the importance of families and to incorporate families into Defence transition policies and practices. This includes the development of the Armed Forces Families Strategy, which seeks to mitigate disadvantage for families, and the Defence Holistic Transition Policy, which emphasises a cultural shift to focus on the whole person and their families throughout service. There are also dedicated funding programmes and initiatives aimed at improving family outcomes and helping families to manage the various aspects of Service life and transition. These include the Armed Forces Families Fund and the Families Hub Information Portal. There are also well-established support systems available for Service families, including the HIVE network, the Families Federations – including the Federations' Forces Families Jobs portal – and families can now access welfare support through Defence Transition Services (now part of Veterans Services).

Despite the progress made, families continue to report feeling unprepared and poorly informed about transition and the wider support available. The extent to which families are fully and consistently supported through transition remains limited by the design and delivery of the transition support system. Unlike Service personnel, families do not receive a set package of support during resettlement and are often reliant on Service personnel to receive and pass on information and guidance about what to expect and their entitlements. In addition, the wider support landscape can be overwhelming, complex and fragmented, inhibiting access to support for families when needed.

A whole family approach is required for transition policy, practice and support, ensuring they meet the needs of both personnel and families, that families feel valued, can access timely and effective support and can thrive both during and after service.

## Policy Issues:



### Complex policy and guidance

Transition policy and guidance remain lengthy and, in many cases, inaccessible behind firewalls. This results in families receiving relevant information via the serving person, which can lead to gaps in information or misinformation.



### Lack of engagement by personnel and families

There are issues with communication relating to transition, leadership inconsistency and uneven usage of readiness tools. There is also little evidence of families receiving transition information during their partner's service. These factors can lead to families not feeling encouraged to or having the knowledge and tools to be able to take personal responsibility for engagement with transition preparation during service.



### Complex transition support landscape

Whilst the Armed Forces charity sector provides support for a range of needs, it can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. This can act as a barrier to families identifying and reaching out to organisations that could support their transition. Continuous changes to the sector and regional variations can add further confusion and challenges.



### Limited or indirect access to support

Transition frameworks like the Defence Holistic Transition Policy and resettlement provisions prioritise the Service person, with limited or indirect access for families. This can lead to families feeling 'left out of the loop' and hinder their ability to prepare for transition, despite MOD policy stating that family support should be routine.

Access to information is essential for families whose military partner is undergoing medical discharge, is unable to engage in available activities, or overseas. Indirect communications can also be particularly challenging for vulnerable households, such as those facing separation, those that have additional needs or experience domestic abuse.



### Challenges integrating into civilian life

Challenges like identity-shift during transition, adaptation to civilian employment and community reintegration are recognised in policy but not yet embedded in practice. There is also a notable lack of resources focusing on immigration and cultural integration support to help non-UK Armed Forces families.



### Lack of awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant

Patchy awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant by organisations across the UK and of their respective responsibilities creates inconsistent implementation and regional variation. This can lead to families experiencing disadvantage or being unable to access support they may be entitled to during and after service.

## Policy Recommendations:



### Simplification of policy and guidance documentation

Defence transition guidance should be more accessible to all end-users, both in terms of readability and accessibility. This includes making relevant documentation available to families outside MOD firewalls where appropriate, and ensuring materials are written in clear, military-jargon-free language. It would enable serving families to proactively understand transition policy and engage with available support, empowering them to take personal responsibility for preparing for transition into civilian life. This would help facilitate and embed a whole family approach to transition.

It would be beneficial to assess whether the approach taken by MOD to 'HR Essentials' (where Civil Service policy has been distilled into a series of short documents) could be applied.



### Reducing the complexity of the support landscape

Reducing complexity and enabling the provision of seamless support, including providing single entry points (without creating bottlenecks) to organisations, is needed. This is particularly the case post-discharge, where the system needs to be more coherent as an ecosystem of support for ex-Service personnel and families.

A more coordinated approach would also enhance the awareness of support and services for families.



### Holistic support to strengthen resilience for the whole household

Defence should consider placing a greater focus on holistic support for Service personnel and families during in-career preparation. This could cover aspects such as the psychological and emotional adjustment to civilian life and financial resilience. Better and earlier identification of families who require additional support – in particular, pre-transition – would prevent poor adjustment to civilian life.

Improved through-life financial support and education that is available to families could help prepare families to leave well.



### Proactive identification of serving and ex-Service families and tracking of outcomes

Improved data quality, access and coherence across the transition landscape. The statutory and voluntary support sectors should explore ways of better collating, tracking and transferring relevant data and information on Service leavers and families. Better identification of families can help ensure they are being effectively supported.

A longitudinal study of ex-Service personnel and their families would also help to fully understand transition outcomes and allow changes over time to be captured.



## Improving awareness of the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces families

Improved awareness and understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant by statutory and non-statutory organisations, as well as their roles and responsibilities in delivering on the Covenant pledge, would help to ensure Armed Forces families are not disadvantaged by service and can access support needed.

Together with increasing awareness of the Covenant, improving public attitudes towards the Armed Forces community would help enable families to integrate into their local communities, secure employment, and form new relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> The cost of poor transition could vary between £63 million and £546 million depending on how individuals experience the negative outcomes (e.g. severity of symptoms, whether they seek help, the type of treatment they receive). This does not include costs to individuals or private businesses.