

Policy Summary: Reframing the narrative on transition

The [Understanding the Transition from Military to Civilian Life report](#) (2025) identifies areas within Defence where in-career transition preparation could be strengthened to help ensure all serving personnel and their families experience a successful transition into civilian life. Whilst we know the majority of Service personnel and their families make a successful transition, some do not. This report estimated the total cost of poor transition to government and the third sector in 2025 to be approximately £258m¹.

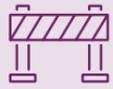
The report highlights the substantial progress made to better support Service leavers and their families. This includes a Defence Holistic Transition Policy and significant resources focused on a range of initiatives to improve and enhance transition support. This has shown a clear policy shift to a whole-person and more holistic approach, supported by in-career tools such as HARDFACTS² and Life Checker³. Interventions to support this approach include a modernised Career Transition Partnership offer with auto-registration, improved online advice, and lifelong access. The report also highlights Defence's continued investment in training and qualifications. More broadly, initiatives such as Op COURAGE, Op RESTORE and Op FORTITUDE, as well as other legislative and programme changes, have further strengthened the support mechanisms available.

Ministry of Defence (MOD) policy is clear that **transition preparation should start during service**, supported by the Chain of Command and driven by personal responsibility from the serving person. However, despite this intent and an MOD policy expectation of in-career progression, this report details key factors which highlight where practice remains uneven and, at times, can act as a blocker to successful transition.

Transition is still too often approached as a late, "end-of-service" activity. This report recommends **reframing the narrative** by normalising preparation throughout the serving person's career. Future transition policy and support will need to adapt to the potential for military careers to be less linear and more interspersed with civilian or Reserve employment, as Defence increases emphasis on the Strategic Reserve and potentially adopts a 'zig-zag' careers approach.

People are at the heart of Defence, and leaving well is a vital part of serving well. Effective through career transition preparation will be critical not only to improving individual skills and wellbeing but also to Defence capability and in ensuring that the positive contribution of former Service personnel and their families is recognised in wider society – strengthening the whole force.

Policy Issues:



Organisational barriers

In some areas of the Armed Forces, talking and preparing to leave may be seen as a professional distraction. As such, in-career preparation can be delayed, and formal communication on the need to plan is limited – despite a policy expectation for this to start during service. This can lead to negative implications during the transition process and post-service.



Leadership inconsistency

Chain of Command behaviour can be a decisive enabler or blocker of access to transition support, often leading to practice and messaging being inconsistent.



Lack of engagement by personnel and families

This report highlights issues with communication relating to transition, leadership inconsistency and uneven usage of readiness tools. These combined factors can lead to Service personnel not feeling encouraged to, or not having the knowledge and tools to be able to take personal responsibility and engage with in-career transition preparation.



Policy and guidance for families

Key guidance remains lengthy and complex, 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.



Usage of readiness to leave tools

Readiness to leave tools exist, such as HARDFACTS and Life Checker, but are not routinely or consistently used across services. In addition, some Service personnel can fear negative consequences if they answer honestly, which can have implications for early identification of issues, particularly those most in need of support.



Lack of identification and tailored support for those most at risk

Whilst there is some understanding of the groups who require additional support (such as those medically discharged or Early Service Leavers), there are others who struggle because they are either not being identified at the point of leaving, or issues present themselves post-discharge. For those who require additional support, it is likely they may require a range of holistic support. However, transition support can often focus primarily on employment, at times at the expense of other key areas such as emotional adjustment, housing guidance, and financial resilience and wellbeing support.

Policy Recommendations:



Reframe the narrative of transition across Defence

Preparing for transition to civilian life should be normalised across Defence to counter the perception that early, proactive preparation is discouraged in the interest of operational effectiveness or retention. Transition should instead be framed as supporting, rather than inhibiting, operational effectiveness. Embedding it more closely with training, education and the employee value proposition, *'the Offer'*, would help reinforce that early and effective preparation supports both the individual and Defence capability.



Leadership

MOD policy outlines that transition should begin in-career with support from the Chain of Command. To improve the consistency of support provided by the Chain of Command, the single services should introduce interventions such as refresher training for those in leadership roles. This would ensure a more coherent approach to how personnel and their families receive information about transition policy and processes, and better encourage them to engage with personal development and transition preparation throughout service.



Encouraging personal responsibility and engagement with transition

Serving personnel should be encouraged by the Chain of Command to take an active personal responsibility for preparing for civilian life, including understanding the realities of civilian life, and making the most of available training and education opportunities (including life skills training).



Policy and guidance for families

Defence transition and 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. This would enable serving personnel and their 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.



Usage of readiness to leave tools

Through making better use of readiness to leave tools, the Chain of Command could more effectively identify Service personnel and families who may struggle during transition, enabling interventions to be implemented during service. This could potentially reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes for the individual, Government, and wider society, and improve the overall effectiveness of transition support.



Improving identification and holistic transition support

Defence should consider placing a greater focus on holistic support for Service personnel and their 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 those who require additional support – in particular, pre-transition – would prevent poor adjustment to civilian life and mitigate the risk of poor mental health outcomes. This report estimates that common mental health costs for poor transition to be £2,172 per person per year⁴.

The *Understanding the Transition from Military to Civilian Life* report (2025) highlights where policy and culture/practice remain inconsistent and can unintentionally act as a barrier to successful transition for Service personnel and their families. Reframing transition as a normal, planned, and valued stage of Service life will be key to unlocking better long-term outcomes for the Armed Forces community, whilst helping to strengthen the whole force.

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ Life Checker is an online tool based upon the areas within the HARDFACTS monitoring tool and produces a report bespoke to each individual, and the outputs generate links to further support where required.

⁴ https://s31949.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/RAND_RRA3493-2.pdf