

Forces in Mind Trust – Policy Statement on Successful Transition to Civilian Life for Service leavers and their families

Purpose

1. This Statement sets out FiMT’s policy position on successful transition to civilian life for ex-Service personnel and their families. It provides an overview of the evidence that exists to support it, the issues that inform it, and the changes that are needed to improve the transition experience for all Service leavers.

Background

2. Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was established in 2011 by a £35 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund. Our vision is for all ex-Service personnel and their families to lead fulfilled civilian lives. Our mission is to enable successful sustainable transition. We deliver our mission by commissioning and funding evidence generation to influence policy makers and service providers, and by improving the capability of the Armed Forces Charities sector.

3. Being able to access appropriate support when needed is essential to achieving a successful and sustainable transition from the Armed Forces into civilian life. In order to address both the barriers encountered during transition, and the solutions to ensuring the right support is available at the right time, we have developed a programmatic approach to our work based on our theory of change¹.

4. FiMT’s programmes cover the key aspects of life that affect transition. We have seven programme areas: health, employment, housing, finance, relationships and criminal justice². Our seventh programme, the Enabler Programme has been developed to address the cross-cutting issues that impact on the other six programme areas. These issues are the focus of this Policy Statement and they include: the need for greater understanding of the ex-Service community; the delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant; the capacity of the military charity sector; the need to improve coordination and collaboration between statutory service providers.

Policy Issues

5. Each year around 15,000 people leave the UK Armed Forces³. The vast majority of Service leavers and their families make a successful transition into civilian life, with their lives having been enormously enriched by their time in service. Even ‘successful’ transitions though are not necessarily ‘easy’, and some ex-Service personnel require additional support during their transition journey. Evidence shows that barriers to accessing appropriate support remain, whether that is

¹ [FiMT’s 2020 Impact Report](#) provides further information on our Change Model

² Further information about the [Enabler Programme](#) and six other programme areas is available on FiMT’s website under [What we fund](#)

³ Quarterly service personnel statistics, MOD

because of quality and availability of support or because of issues relating to the stigma of taking the initial step to seek help⁴.

6. For the minority of Service leavers who have a difficult transition, there are significant costs as a consequence, both to the individual and their family, and to the public purse. Research evidence based on economic modelling estimated the total cost of poor transitions from the United Kingdom's Armed Forces to be around £110million in 2020⁵.

7. Government policy is to support those who have served in the UK Armed Forces, and their families, to transition smoothly back into civilian life and contribute fully to a society that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer. This is the vision set out in the Strategy for Our Veterans published by the Ministry of Defence in 2018. The Principles that inform the Strategy are:

- Veterans are first and foremost civilians and continue to be of benefit to wider society
- Veterans are encouraged and enabled to maximise their potential as civilians
- Veterans are able to access support that meets their needs when necessary through public and voluntary sectors

There is some way to go before this vision is fully realised, and we know that at present the transition journey continues to be especially difficult for some Service leavers⁶.

Policy Position

8. We believe that the chances of making a successful transition to civilian life would be increased if all Service leavers and their families are able to prepare well and have access to appropriate support when and where they need it. This requires a more personalised approach to the transition process so that there is earlier and fuller engagement with the challenges and opportunities likely to arise during the move from military to civilian life.

9. We support the Armed Forces Covenant which states that no ex-Service person or their spouse or partner should be disadvantaged as result of service, and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases⁷. This means that in some circumstances the unique experiences and needs of ex-Service personnel and their families will require the provision of a specialist service. The key issue is that there must be sufficient expertise, awareness and understanding of the ex-Forces community, and that this must be taken into account in the design and delivery of service provision.

10. We also support the Strategy for Our Veterans, and its vision that 'those who have served in the UK Armed Forces, and their families, transition smoothly back into civilian life and contribute

⁴ Stigma and Barriers to care in service leavers with mental health problems, Kings College London, 2017

⁵ Transition Mapping Study, Continue to Work, Kantar Futures, 2017

⁶ Lifting Our Sights, The Transition Journey, Future Agenda, 2021

⁷ This principle is enshrined in both the Armed Forces Covenant and the NHS Constitution

fully to a society that understands and values what they have done and what they have to offer⁸. Our view is that the ex-Service community would enjoy wider recognition in society if public perceptions and understanding of the Armed Forces were more closely aligned to the realities of service in the 21st century.

11. Successful and sustainable transition requires both wider understanding of the issues faced by Service leavers and their families, and improved coordination and collaboration in the delivery of support services within the military charity sector, and between the public and charity sectors.

Overview of evidence and issues

12. **Transition Mapping Studies.** The first Transition Mapping Study (TMS) was published in 2013, and an evaluation was conducted in 2017⁹. The study provided a holistic overview, set out the transition process for the first time, and identified what needs to work better to support successful transition. It has informed the transition research agenda and the MOD's Strategy for Our Veterans. It also included a cost model, which put a value on the cost of poor transition, and the findings and recommendations continue to be used to inform policy, research and practice.

13. The Transition Mapping Study, Continue to Work¹⁰, was a follow-on study with a specific focus on employment transition and skills transfer which showed that some of the difficulties that Service leavers experienced in the research for the TMS 2013, such as pressure on resettlement resources and postings away from home during the resettlement period, were still being experienced. A key recommendation of this report was the need for 'permission to prepare' so that appropriate preparation for transition could become a cultural norm across the Services.

14. **Lord Ashcroft's Veterans' Transition Review**¹¹ was published in 2014. It considered the policies and provision for Services leavers, and its recommendations complemented those of the Transition Mapping Study. The principal recommendations included the need for: the MOD and the Armed Forces to be more proactive in changing perceptions of Service leavers; a new work placement scheme to be introduced in partnership with industry; early Service leavers to get the same transition support as longer serving personnel.

15. **Lifting Our Sights: The Transition Journey** was published in 2021 as part of FiMT's Lifting Our Sights project on the impact of future trends of the transition of the Armed Forces community. Based on the findings of ethnographic research with ex-Service personnel, alongside quantified findings, the research led to the creation of an 'archetypal Transition journey model' which identified eight stages of the journey, through from the decision to join to confronting the realities of a return to civilian life.¹². The findings showed that even 'successful' transitions are not

⁸ The Strategy for our Veterans, MOD and Cabinet Office, 2018

⁹ 2013 Transition Mapping Study Evaluation, Arkenford Bright Minds, 2017

¹⁰ Transition Mapping Study, Continue to Work, Kantar Futures, 2017

¹¹ Veterans' Transition Review, Lord Ashcroft, 2014

¹² Lifting Our Sights: The Transition Journey, 2020

necessarily 'easy' transitions, that closing the chapter on life in service is difficult to achieve and that preparation for transition goes beyond resettlement services and personal planning.

Factors affecting transition

16. **The transition process.** There are inevitable tensions in the transition process arising from the need to continue to meet the demands of Service life and at the same time find space for preparation and planning for post-Service life. These tensions may be exacerbated if the Service leaver is:

- Deployed on operations away from their home base for a significant period in the last 2 years before discharge.
- Confronted with a number of myths and mixed messages about civilian life from both within and without the Armed Forces¹³.

In research with families, partners cited that they (the serving person) were often unprepared for the extent to which their lives would change, and how they would be affected by the substantial differences between military and civilian norms¹⁴.

17. **Structural barriers** can disadvantage Service leavers. For example:

- Military qualifications are not recognized in the civilian labour market, even when they are for skills that are transferable and in demand¹⁵, although it is recognized that much work has been done on achieving civilian accreditation and alignment with the National Skills Qualification Framework. Employers tend to underestimate the skill sets of ex-Service personnel¹⁶. This can become a barrier, especially when combined with low levels of non-military qualifications.
- Veteran-specific health and care services vary across the UK as each devolved nation is responsible for healthcare provision for veterans and their families living within their nation¹⁷. Differences and inconsistencies can also occur in the provision of treatment and support for service-acquired conditions compared to provision while in service. This can be a consequence of varying levels of commitment and understanding of policy guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant and its application in the commissioning of veteran-specific services¹⁸.
- The mobility associated with Service life and transition can create educational disruptions for children in Armed Forces families. Moving to a new school or college may result in discontinuity between local curriculums (for example, repeating some learning and/or

¹³ Kantar Futures: Continue to work. The Transition Mapping Study 2017, 2017

¹⁴ Applying BI to successful transition, The Behavioural Insights Team, 2019

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Business in the Community, Capitalising on military talent, FiMT, 2016

¹⁷ Joint Health Needs Assessment in the devolved nations of the UK, Community Innovations Enterprise, 2016

¹⁸ Utilisation of the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in NHS trusts and CCGs across England, a freedom of information investigation, VFR Hub, 2019

missing out elsewhere), having to adjust quickly to requirements of different exam boards and (re)building relationships with peers and staff ¹⁹.

18. **Perceptions.** While research with the general public shows that seven out of the top eight characteristics associated with those who have served in the UK Armed Forces are positive, with self-discipline and loyalty at the top, there are also negative traits associated with having served in the Armed Forces. The most commonly associated negative trait was ‘institutionalised’²⁰. When this is considered together with the finding that veterans face negative stereotypes when applying for jobs, with nearly one fifth of UK organisations participating in an employment-focused survey saying that they are unlikely to consider hiring veterans due to negative perceptions of their time spent in the Armed Forces, it is clear that the issue of negative perceptions is a significant barrier to successful transition²¹.

19. More broadly, there is an overall concern about a ‘positive, but false, outdated view of what the military do today’, and a concern that there will be a ‘complete loss of public understanding about the role the military plays’²². These findings, combined with the ongoing challenge that charities delivering services face in supporting and empowering the veterans they exist to serve while at the same time enlisting public sympathy in order to fundraise, means that public perceptions have become skewed towards the minority of veterans that are struggling to adapt to civilian life.

Profile of Service leavers and their families who have an increased likelihood of experiencing difficulties when they leave the Armed Forces.

20. Some Service leavers are more likely than others to struggle with the process of transition to civilian life. These include:

- Female Service leavers²³
- Service leavers from UK Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- Non-UK Service leavers who encounter barriers in obtaining the legal right to work in the UK²⁴
- Service leavers who have been medically discharged
- Early Service leavers (who have served four years or less): the employment rate for ESLs is relatively low with only 52% reported to be in education, training or employment six months after leaving²⁵

¹⁹ Focus On: Armed Forces Charities Support for Families, 2020

²⁰ Public Perceptions of Veterans and the Armed Forces, YouGov, 2018

²¹ Veteran Employment research by YouGov, 2019

²² Lifting Our Sights, Future Agenda, 2020

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Pearson C, Caddick N: Meeting the Needs of Commonwealth Personnel and Families: A Map of Service Provision, FiMT Research Centre, Cobseo, Army Families Federation, 2018

²⁵ Pike, A, Deployment to Employment, The Royal British Legion, 2016

- Those who served in the British Army, who are significantly more likely than those who served in the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force to be unemployed six months after leaving the UK Armed Forces.

Addressing the issues – where are we now?

21. Significant progress has been made since the Transition Mapping Study 2013 was first published. The follow-on study, Continue to Work²⁶, highlighted the tangible progress made through the inclusion of Early Service Leavers (ESLs) in the resettlement provision provided by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), the launch of the Veterans' Gateway in 2017 as a single point of contact, and greater co-ordination among Armed Forces charities. The creation of Defence Transition Services (DTS) in 2019 as part of the MOD's new Holistic Transition Policy was further recognition of the need for tailored information and support for those Service leavers and their families most likely to face challenges as they leave the armed forces. However, some Service leavers and their families continue to struggle to make a successful transition, and even those who succeed in doing so say that 'a successful transition is not necessarily an easy transition'²⁷.

22. **The Strategy for Our Veterans**, published in 2018, set out a ten-year vision, principles, cross-cutting factors and key themes and outcomes to be achieved by 2028. An update is due to be published in 2023, and FiMT has published a set of strategic goals as part of its futures project, Lifting Our Sights, to help support the delivery of the Strategy.

23. **The Office for Veterans' Affairs** was established in 2019 as a Ministerial unit in the Cabinet Office, with the aim of making sure the United Kingdom is the best place to be a veteran anywhere in the world, marked a further commitment by the UK Government to fulfilling its lifelong duty to those who have served in the Armed Forces.

24. **The Armed Forces Covenant** was introduced in 2011 and is a 'promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces and their families, are treated fairly. The Armed Forces Community should therefore face no disadvantage compared to civilians, and in some appropriate circumstances, such as those who have been injured, may be given special consideration'²⁸. All local authorities in Great Britain, and four Northern Ireland councils, have pledged to uphold the principles of the Covenant and over 4,000 organizations have signed the Covenant²⁹. While much good practice exists, there is evidence that improvements in local delivery are needed and there are some aspects of the Covenant where there is a mis-match between what is perceived to be the Covenant's remit, and what is actually delivered³⁰.

²⁶ Continue to Work, The transition Mapping Study 2017, Kantar Futures, 2017

²⁷ The Transition Journey, Lifting Our Sights, Future Agenda, 2021

²⁸ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

²⁹ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/get-involved/who-has-signed-the-covenant/>

³⁰ Our Community, Our Covenant, FiMT, LGA, Shared Intelligence, 2016

25. **Legislating for the Covenant.** The Armed Forces Bill 2020 is due to be enacted before the end of 2021 and come into force in the summer of 2022. It will introduce a duty to have due regard to the principles of the Covenant when developing policy and making decisions in the areas of housing, healthcare and education. FiMT is currently funding a research study into the overall impact of the Armed Forces Covenant across the UK and the full range of public authority service providers, which is due to be published in summer 2022. As well as providing robust evidence of the impact of the Covenant to date, it will provide a baseline for future impact evaluation before the Covenant is enshrined in law³¹.

26. **Capacity of the Armed Forces charity sector.** Evidence from research by the Directory of Social Change's series of Sector Insight reports on the UK Armed Forces charity sector shows that the population of Armed Forces charities is contracting, not growing. Furthermore, more than a third (38.6%) of charities surveyed expected financial issues and funding would be a challenge going forward. These were findings from research conducted prior to March 2020 when the Covid 19 pandemic struck. Since then, FiMT has funded a series of Cobseo Members' surveys on the impact of Covid (Cobseo is the Confederation of Service Charities). The latest wave of findings show that beneficiary demand remains heightened, while at the same time 60% of respondents reported a decrease in income and only 18% reported an increase³².

27. **Knowledge, evidence and forecasting of need.** We know that around 15,000³³ people leave the Armed Forces each year, and it is estimated that there are around 2.75 million veterans living in the UK. Nonetheless there remains a lack of detailed data and insight into the specific needs of UK ex-Service personnel and their families. While there have been some positive developments in the collection and availability of data, for example through the Veteran Friendly GP Practices initiative³⁴, at a macro level there is still insufficient information on the demographics of the Armed Forces community which makes it difficult to understand, plan and forecast future support needs. The lack of consistent and easily available data on need is being filled in part by the map of welfare needs developed by Northumbria University³⁵, drawing on data from publicly available statistics, and directly from Armed Forces charities, but it is dependent on the collection of public data on use of services that is not as comprehensive or consistent as it could be.

28. **The 2021 Census of Population** included a question 'Have you previously served in the UK Armed Forces?' which means that for the first-time veterans will be able to identify themselves as former military personnel. After the 2021 census data are published, the ONS will investigate the production of statistics on the veteran population by linking the Census with the MOD's Service Leavers Database (which is not publicly accessible) and other administrative data sources. However,

³¹ This research project follows on from previous Our Community, Our Covenant reports and is being conducted by Shared Intelligence in partnership with RAND Europe and Meri Mayhew Consulting.

³² Cobseo Members' Survey Report: Impact of Covid-19, Directory of Social Change, 2021

³³ The MOD publish Quarterly Service Statistics. Further information and data sources are available in the Veterans Fact Sheet, Office for Veterans Affairs, 2020

³⁴ [Veteran Friendly GP Practices](#) is an initiative by the RCGP, NHS England and NHS Improvement which asks patients if they have ever served in the British Armed Forces, and records their service on their patient record

³⁵ Northern Hub for Veterans and Families Research, Northumbria University

the earliest that this is likely to happen is in 2023. In the meantime, and possibly beyond 2023, there is a lack of consistent longitudinal data capable of comparison over time, and with the civilian population. Instead, there are pockets of data that cannot be easily linked together.

29. **The devolved administrations** in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland work with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, together with other Government Departments and the wider Armed Forces charity sector, to support ex-Service personnel and their families. In Scotland and Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioners have been appointed by their Governments to improve outcomes for veterans by acting as champions and ambassadors for veterans. The Welsh Government is currently in the process of appointing a Veterans Commissioner. There are currently no plans to introduce the role in England.

Addressing the issues – what needs to happen

30. Many of the changes needed to improve transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life are addressed in the Government's Strategy for Our Veterans. This 10-year Strategy includes a commitment to addressing the cross-cutting factors that affect service provision for veterans across all the key themes that affect veterans' lives. These cover the need for improvements in:

- Collaboration between organisations
- Coordination of veteran's services
- Data on the veteran community
- Public perception and understanding of the veteran community
- Recognition of veterans

31. FiMT's recently published research, *Lifting Our Sights Beyond 2030*, analyses the likely impact of future trends on transition, and identifies action that must be taken now to ensure we can continue to support those transitioning out of the Armed Forces in 2030 and beyond. The changes needed are summarized in the recommendations made which are complementary to those in the Strategy for Our Veterans. *Lifting Our Sights* recommends that we work together to:

- **Empower the system** by ensuring that the wider military and civilian systems which ex-Service personnel interact with understand the transition journey, for example by:
 - Collecting data to better understand the demographics, locations and needs of veterans
 - Ensuring every Service leaver has access to a digital health and social care record and registration into the NHS
- **Empower the civilian** by equipping ex-Service personnel to lead successful and fulfilled lives by helping them to take more responsibility for their career and personal finances in the military and beyond, for example by:
 - Widening awareness of the support already available to help Armed Forces personnel take control of their careers and personal finances

- Introducing mandatory registration with Career Transition Partnership for all Armed Forces personnel
- **Personalise the transition process** by shifting support services so transition is tailored to individual serving personnel and their families. Earlier dialogue will be important, so pre-emptive support can be put in place, for example by:
 - Regularly update transition provision so that it responds to the needs of current and future service leavers.
 - Building transition and life skills as part of mandatory training throughout a Service career
- **Build accurate perceptions** by improving and broadening public understanding of the role of the Armed Forces and the skills of Service personnel, for example by:
 - Narrowing the perception gap with proactive initiatives to help people better understand the Armed Forces, and tackle the rise of misinformation, particularly on social media.
 - Better communicating the transferrable skills offered by ex-Service personnel to businesses.

32. Alongside the cross-cutting factors set out in the Strategy for Our Veterans, the Strategy also identifies six key themes affecting veterans' lives. As part of the Lifting Our Sights project, the most relevant foresights were identified, mapped against each stage of the transition journey to see when challenges were most likely to be experienced, and these challenges were then put forward as suggested goals for 2030 that will help to deliver the actions needed across each of the six key themes. These goals are practical and specific, for example, under the employment, education and skills theme one of the goals is 'The MOD offers members of the Armed Forces the ability to access civilian internships/placements'. As Government works on the update of the Strategy for Our Veterans, due to be published in 2023, FiMT will be working to ensure that the value of the suggested goals included in Lifting Our Sights are drawn upon to inform the Strategy and its delivery in practice.

33. In order to ensure that the experience of transition continues to improve, and all ex-Service personnel and their families are able to make a successful transition to civilian life, we recommend that all organisations and individuals who are involved in supporting the Armed Forces community engage now with challenges and opportunities that are either certain or likely to arise in future years. This will help to ensure that provision of support matches need as closely as it can. We therefore commend the Lifting Our Sights report and practical toolkit designed to help local Government, national and devolved Governments, the charity sector, and the media, as a means of better aligning strategy, service delivery and support for those who are still serving and those who have made, or are in the process of making, the move to civilian life with all the changes that it entails.

Measuring success

34. Some of the measures of success sit under FiMT's other programme areas and are set out in our Policy Statements on Health, Housing, Employment, Finance, Criminal Justice, and Relationships³⁶. The extent to which the Outcomes for 2028 included in the Strategy for Our Veterans are successfully achieved, and the Lifting Our Sights Strategic Goals for 2030 are reached, will be critical indicators of success.

35. We are currently considering the need for a longitudinal survey of overall wellbeing of ex-Service personnel and their families, and will be discussing this with the MOD and the Office for Veterans' Affairs. If it is taken forward it could provide a meaningful measure of successful transition and help capture the extent to which the experience of transition is improving.

Reflections and next steps

36. The changes we are calling for need investment and concerted effort. This requires a collaborative and integrated approach as well as sufficient funding. Understanding likely future needs and planning ahead is crucial. Forces in Mind Trust will continue to generate evidence that sheds light on needs, and on what works best in practice, and to use that to influence positive change across the United Kingdom.

³⁶ FiMT's Policy Statements are available at www.fim-trust.org/news-policy/