



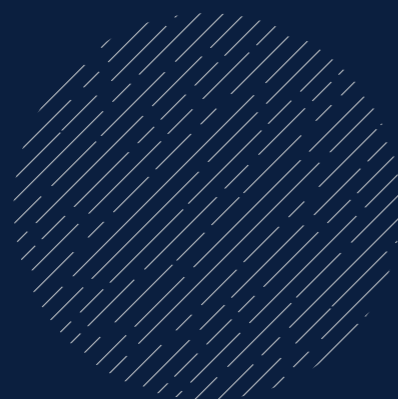
Accredited vocational training within supported employment for veterans:

An evaluation of impact within Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company

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Foreword

Thank you for your interest in Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company (SBMC) and this exciting new evaluation.

RBLI has been engaging with unemployed veterans for over 100 years: providing opportunities to veterans in our social enterprises and delivering our award-winning employability programme Lifeworks, nationwide since 2011. Our Lifeworks outcomes with 80% into work or training within 12 months are outstanding. With this track record, we recognised the opportunity to do even more for veterans in our newest social enterprise in Renfrewshire and from its foundation in 2018 we set out to achieve just that.

Within the military, new qualifications or courses are often the ticket to promotion or greater opportunity, yet so many of those achievements are not recognised out of uniform. This was reiterated by the first group of veterans that joined us in Scotland and is one of the drivers for our vocational training programme at SBMC: to offer accredited qualifications to veteran employees in-house, confirm their many transferable skills, embolden them and push them towards new opportunities. Alongside practical experience, accredited qualifications can be the catalyst for veterans to rediscover their confidence, imagine a genuine career trajectory, go for new opportunities and command a greater salary. Relevant NVQs make it realistic for veterans to apply for more senior roles paying upwards of £5k more than entry level roles. This evaluation has also highlighted improved mental wellbeing and increased general happiness.

The resulting evaluation of this exciting project in Scotland and the achievements of and positive impact on the veterans that participated has given RBLI the drive to dramatically improve the learning opportunities in our English social

enterprise locations. In 2024, RBLI will launch a new campaign which will create a learning academy in Britain's Bravest Manufacturing Company in Kent. We hope also that it can be the spark for others to do likewise.

The military charity sector must join together to lobby for more accessible vocational learning opportunities for our nation's veterans, who have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for us. The Armed Forces Covenant specifically works to ensure that no veteran should be disadvantaged by their service, and this report demonstrates that workplace learning, and transferable skills can be accredited in a way that is tailored to each veteran. It is our duty to do more to help veterans build a second life after their service, and qualifications are a meaningful and effective way to help overcome barriers to civilian employment and improve mental wellbeing.

We would like to extend our thanks to the teams at Forces in Mind Trust, and at Glasgow Caledonian University who have made this evaluation happen. We would also like to thank the veterans at Scotland's Bravest for taking part in this evaluation and for inspiring us to further develop our qualification offering for veterans in England.

We also remain forever grateful to the late Jackie Johnson, whose wonderful vision and energy, and life-long commitment to social enterprise, kick-started this vital focus on skills and qualifications.

Thank you again for your interest.

Lisa
Lisa Farmer
Chief Executive



Executive Summary

BACKGROUND

Established in 2018, Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company (SBMC) was created to facilitate supported return to work through gaining specific and general work skills and by being employed in a supportive environment. SBMC operates as a business, predominantly creating signage, which involves a range of manufacturing operations and processes. Over the course of 12 or 18 months, veterans employed at SBMC took part in a progressive employment training programme which aimed to support veterans who were struggling to successfully find employment or to find employment that was suitable to their needs. Individuals on the programme were employed on a living wage gaining both specific vocational skills and generic skills relating to employability which are often associated with personal development and increased confidence.

A range of accredited qualifications were offered to veterans during the progressive employment training programme, including manufacturing and IT related NVQ and SCQF qualifications. This project aimed to implement the addition of a Training Manager, who was an accredited training assessor, within the progressive employment training programme of Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company, and to evaluate the impact on the long-term job prospects, confidence levels, attainment of recognised qualifications, work readiness, employability and mental wellbeing of the veterans participating in the programme.

METHODS

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with ten veterans taking part in the employment training programme at SBMC. Participants were asked questions about the impact of participation in the programme and gaining accredited qualifications on their work readiness, employability, confidence and mental wellbeing. Short online surveys were also used to collect demographic information from veteran participants and to inform the interview questions. The study adopted a longitudinal approach in the collection of data over a one-year period to allow for analysis of any change in participant reporting. The first phase of data collection took place between March and October 2022, and the second phase took place between March and July 2023.

RESULTS

All of the participants in the study were male and the majority were over the age of 40 years. All of the participants had departed the Armed Forces at least six years before they commenced the progressive employment training programme with SBMC. Seven participants had served in the British Army and three in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines, with varied length of service, ranging between <5 to 25 years. Reasons for leaving the Armed Forces included physical health reasons (n=2), mental health reasons (n=2), family reasons (n=3) and personal choice (n=3).

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

- Eight of the ten participants had been previously employed in civilian workplaces after leaving the Armed Forces, one participant had been a 'stay-at-home parent', and one participant had been long-term unemployed due to addiction issues. They all reported having been employed in multiple workplaces since leaving the Armed Forces, on either part-time, short term or temporary contracts.
- Eight participants reported that they found it difficult to find work that they enjoyed or that was suitable to their personal routine, physical health or disability related mobility needs. The remaining two participants struggled with employment due to combat related stress and issues related to alcohol use.
- Most participants felt that their military background was an advantage to civilian employers due to their varied skills, knowledge and work ethic. However, some reported experiences where they felt employers had been resistant to employing someone from a military background due to their previous rank or role in the Armed Forces and associated perception of being aggressive or too assertive, or negative views of their combat related mental health issues.
- The majority of participants stated that they had been attracted to SBMC as a workplace because it specialises in veteran employment and they would be working with fellow veterans. There was also an understanding by many that SBMC was a workplace that was very supportive and trusting of their employees, and that SBMC management was particularly sympathetic and supportive of the needs of veterans and their personal lives.

IMPACTS OF PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME ON WORK READINESS

- Barriers to work readiness reported by the ten veteran participants included having a general lack of accredited qualifications, military skills and qualifications not being recognised or transferable to civilian employment, a lack of pathways or opportunities to convert Armed Forces skills and qualifications into recognised accreditations, and a lack of awareness of procedures for applying for employment in civilian workplaces.
- The employment training programme was found to impact veterans by providing a validation and formal recognition of the skills and knowledge they already had, by preparing them for employment through learning new skills, and developing or refreshing existing skills, raising their awareness of the need for formal training, and allowing them to demonstrate a continued willingness to learn new things. We note that The Scottish Government introduced guidance on qualifications obtained in the military whilst the current study was in progress.¹

IMPACTS OF PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME ON CONFIDENCE

- Three of the participants reported having a general lack of confidence before taking part in the progressive employment training programme. This was most commonly related to participants having a decrease in confidence after leaving the Armed Forces and struggling to find suitable employment, feeling a loss of routine, and adjusting to a new lifestyle.
- The majority of participants reported that they got confidence from learning new skills and gaining new knowledge from the progressive employment training programme. In learning new skills, and also refreshing their knowledge, two participants stated that they had a greater sense of pride in themselves and self-worth.
- Gaining accredited qualifications gave participants a greater sense of confidence in being work-ready or more employable. Some participants also felt a confidence and contentedness in their ability to actively seek other employment as a result of taking part in the progressive employment training programme.

IMPACTS OF PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME ON MENTAL WELLBEING

- Two of the participants found that taking part in the training and qualifications was providing a useful distraction from mental health challenges they were facing, frequently related to PTSD. In having something to occupy their minds, they felt that they were less inclined to think about their situation.
- Taking part in the progressive employment training programme was also found to increase participants' general happiness. Two participants felt that their happiness was increased by achieving something through completing qualifications. One of the participants also stated that they felt increased happiness through the amount of variety that the progressive employment training programme brought to their working day. Two of the participants also felt that the progressive employment training programme gave them a sense of purpose and something to look forward to in the future.

DELIVERY OF THE PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME

- Two of the participants particularly appreciated the way that the training and accreditation element was broken down into manageable tasks by the Training Manager to make it easier. In particular, participants valued the flexible and adaptable approach of the Training Manager.
- A large proportion of the participants emphasised that the success of the delivery of the programme was down to the support and encouragement of the Training Manager and their understanding of the needs and capabilities of each veteran.
- The only challenge to the delivery of the progressive employment training was the ability to schedule training and learning around tasks that were required on the factory floor, and to manage the time of individual employees. Nonetheless, the Training Manager was able to continually adapt the times and dates of the delivery of training and learning to fit individual needs and schedules.

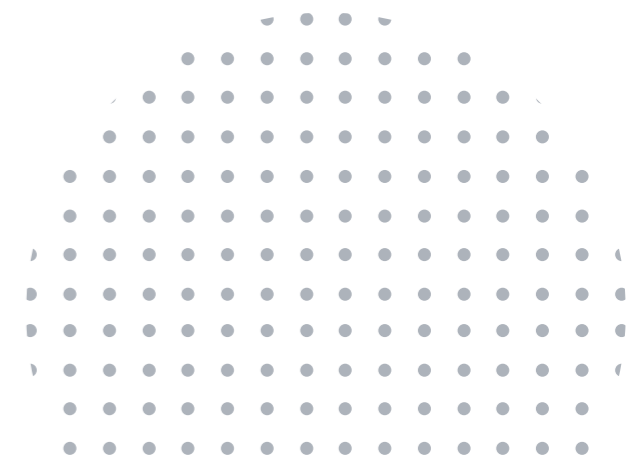
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings show that the implementation of accredited training within SBMC's progressive employment training programme had a range of positive impacts on the veteran participants. These included impacts that could be perceived as tangible, providing specific skills and qualifications essential to enhance the employability and work readiness of veterans, and less tangible including enhanced confidence level and improved mental wellbeing. As such, potential policies and investments in employment programmes should recognise the added value of the interventions that go beyond the economic impacts of employment and incorporates social and wellbeing benefits.

Whilst this small-scale study contributes to new evidence in a relatively understudied area, our emerging findings point to a need for more supportive work environments for veterans and offer the following implications. Firstly, we see the importance of the delivery of flexible training and accredited qualifications

that are tailored toward the specific needs of veterans who lack recognised certification. Gaining formal skills, including both basic - such as health and safety training, or more specialised - such as IT qualifications, is essential in enhancing veterans' employability. Secondly, there might be different purposes of training and employability programmes for veterans: while providing training, developing new skills, and offering formal education can ensure long-term employment within as well as beyond the support organisation, in some cases providing employment opportunities to help veterans remain active and reach retirement age might be sufficient. Thirdly, to ensure a smooth transition to a civilian work environment, there is a need to target veterans who have recently left the Armed Forces and require employment support. Indeed, the lack of instant support might lead to disappointment and, thereafter, disengagement with the labour market.

Emerging evidence from our study may be used to provide indications to policy and practice in terms of ways to strategically target funding and support for this type of intervention. Further, this study can be used to highlight some of the key barriers and facilitators (e.g. the articulation and translation of skills and knowledge) for transition into employment to practitioners working in this area (e.g. veteran companies, leaders, organisations). Findings may also provide some practical insights into the set up and delivery of such programmes by individuals and groups seeking to set up further schemes in the future. Nonetheless, due to the small-scale nature of this study, further research is required using larger sample sizes to be able to provide evidence across varied contexts to aid its replicability and representativeness. Studies would also benefit from the addition of quantitative, as well as qualitative methods to provide more empirical insights.



1

Introduction and background.

While most veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life, some service leavers face serious challenges including the need to find secure stable and fulfilling employment. An estimated 925,000 working age veterans live across the UK², with approximately 15,000 veterans leaving the UK Armed Forces each year³. In Scotland, veterans make up 5% of the adult Scottish population residing in households¹. Most veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life, with 81% of recently transitioned veterans being in employment⁴. However, the transition is not always easy, with over a quarter of veterans who live in Scotland reporting the process of finding the right job being 'very difficult'³.

This particular challenge can be compromised by the existence of 'complex, comorbid mental health and physical well-being difficulties'⁵. In a 2016 survey, veterans with a disability had a lower rate of employment (53%) compared to those without (74%)⁶. More than half (57%) of veterans with a mental health disability and 41% of those with other disabilities found it very difficult to find the right employment³. Some veterans reported that leaving the Armed Forces as a result of medical discharge meant that the initial search for work took place during a period of 'panic' or 'shock'⁵.

The UK and Scottish Governments have introduced various measures to reduce challenges to employment of veterans, including the introduction of a Veterans Employability Strategic Group⁷, the Office for Veterans' Affairs Veterans' Career Development Fund⁸, incentives for employers⁹ and raising awareness of the skills of veterans⁶. The Scottish Government supports the ethos of the Armed Forces Covenant and makes commitment that 'no one should suffer disadvantage as a result of their military service'⁶. According to Weir et al.⁴, the 'significant minority' of service leavers that experience problems related to mental health and physical well-being do not engage with treatment programmes due to a range of reasons: stigma, not feeling understood, poor recognition of need, disconnection from support services, and only accepting support when a crisis point has been reached.

Providing support to gain and retain employment has been proposed as one way of supporting individuals with recovery from long-term mental health problems¹⁰. Such support can act on multiple levels, including providing purpose, structure, and opportunities to contribute to society, engaging in processes which build self-esteem, self-understanding and motivation. Being in work can also have a positive effect on identity

and social networks. However, employment can only support recovery if it is suitable for the individual and undertaken in a flexible and supportive workplace⁸. By understanding and meeting the specific needs of veterans, these training initiatives play a crucial role in empowering them to not only secure meaningful employment but also thrive in their post-military careers.

Although not always considered the most important issue, veterans frequently reported lack of skills and adapting to civilian working culture as difficult on transitioning from the Armed Forces. In a survey of recently transitioned veterans, 81% of whom found employment, 24% cited lack of qualifications and experience, 13% problems with job applications and skills, and 7% adapting to civilian life as reasons why they struggled to find work³. In a study which aimed to focus on the experience of veterans who struggle to gain or sustain employment, 84% of surveyed veterans said they needed support to adapt to a changed working culture⁵. The third most important problem with getting work (reported by 47% of veterans) was lack of relevant training or skills. Mental health difficulties were also a problem preventing 38% of these veterans from getting back to work.

It was not the scope of this project to investigate military culture, or career pathways within the military, and the impact on later transition to civilian life. Nevertheless, much has been written about the unique nature of military service, training regimes, vocational pathways through a rank system which point to a workplace structure and hierarchy that is markedly different from a mainstream civilian work environment^{11,12,13}. It is worth noting that Lord Ashcroft in his landmark national transition review of 2014¹⁴ specifically recommended the need for veterans to have individual personal development plans. The review acknowledged that taking recruits in to the UK military at a young age, with low educational attainment, and channelling them through prescribed vocational apprenticeship pathways, and the rank system, was not equipping individuals to stand on their own two feet when leaving the Armed Forces. Furthermore, the review recommended that basic military training should include "life skills", e.g. housing



and financial skills, to support veterans when leaving the service. More recent research funded by Forces in Mind Trust showed that whilst most service personnel and their partners believed that they have a good level of life skills, a minority struggled with poor life skills. The report found that for those who struggled, this was largely attributed to the Armed Forces lifestyle including mobility impacting on the continuity of adult education and not having to do things for themselves (leading to a lack of opportunity to hone skills)¹⁵. The study showed that in particular, veterans required further support with applying for jobs, financial/money skills and IT/digital skills, amongst other things.

An extensive needs analysis and consultation was undertaken by Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) in 2017¹⁶. Initial engagement meetings were conducted, and these were followed by consultation with operational-level stakeholders. Information was supplemented with feedback from questionnaires completed by veterans attending an RBLI-run employment support course for military veterans and their families (Lifeworks) in Scotland. The consultation concluded that there was a specific need in Scotland for employability schemes in sectors veterans would realistically move towards and that were attached to permanent work opportunities, meaningful work experience, or measurable skill development. There was

recognition that employability schemes needed to respect the local needs, culture and conditions of the area in which they were situated. It was identified that flexible working patterns would be important, allowing individuals to engage at a level which would not affect benefit status.

RBLI's consultation specifically covered the potential location of a new RBLI factory in Erskine Hospital grounds in Bishopton, Renfrewshire⁹. Glasgow and Renfrewshire were perceived by stakeholders to have longstanding issues relating to worklessness and an entrenched welfare culture. Many of the potential beneficiaries would come to work from some of Scotland's most deprived areas of Glasgow and its surroundings as identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁷. Nearly 20% of veterans who attend the RBLI Lifeworks courses in Scotland were based in Glasgow and Ayrshire. Of the nine veterans asked for feedback after an RBLI Lifeworks course in central Scotland, seven were living with health conditions or a disability, and eight who were living in the Glasgow area reported positive interest in working in skilled manufacturing locally. The consultation generated positive statements of interest from

five different organisations to collaborate and refer disadvantaged veterans to the programme.

Established in 2018, Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company (SBMC)¹⁸ was created to facilitate supported return to work through gaining specific and general work skills and by being employed in a supportive environment. SBMC mainly manufactures signs and plaques, including delivering large tenders for NHS Scotland, Forestry and Land Scotland, National Highways, Amey, Barratt Developments and Bear Scotland. The manufacture of signage and plaques includes metal work, graphic design, engraving, fulfilment and finishing, planning, logistics and customer service, with opportunities to learn and use state-of-the-art water jet cutting and engraving technologies and machinery. SBMC's approach can be located and understood within the Individual Placement Support (IPS) model¹⁹. In particular, this model allows those facing challenges to their health and personal life to engage in paid work and structured volunteering placements. It sees employment, with support, as a key part of their personal recovery.

SBMC recruited its first five veterans in August 2018 and began trading later in the same year, growing the team gradually. Employment opportunities were advertised openly, but also promoted via partner groups such as Combat Stress, SSAFA: The Armed Forces Charity and the Department for Work and Pensions. Most of the veterans applied to SBMC directly, however some were signposted through partner organisations. The first veteran beneficiaries were unable to access formal, accredited training but SBMC closely emphasised getting the culture right in preparation for what the organisation aspired to achieve once a degree of business resilience and proof of viability was reached.

The first beneficiaries were employed on a fixed term basis for 18 months: this being identified as a good balance to impart new skills and significantly enhance the employability of the beneficiaries beyond SBMC. The first veterans transitioned on to other employment in line with their contract end dates as planned. This model proved successful and the business grew in line with ambitious annual targets, surviving a pandemic and enforced temporary closure in 2020. Since SBMC opened, 37 veterans have been employed, have volunteered at the organisation,

or have been supported through sign posting, or welfare support. SBMC has also supported a number of military family members and others facing barriers to employment.

In 2020 Forces in Mind Trust approved RBLI and Glasgow Caledonian University's joint application to evaluate the progressive employment training programme at SBMC (as an independent qualitative evaluation by an external academic institution) and both organisations designed and agreed a delivery plan in order to launch in late 2020. The aim of this project was to implement the addition of a Training Manager, who was an accredited training assessor, within the progressive employment training programme of Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company and to evaluate the impact on the long-term job prospects, confidence levels, attainment of recognised qualifications, work readiness, employability and mental wellbeing of the veterans participating in the programme. This would be the first employment and vocational based intervention for veterans of its kind in the UK, with the majority of programmes only in existence in the US. The research study by Glasgow Caledonian University took place between January 2021 and December 2023.



2



Methods

2.1. THE PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME

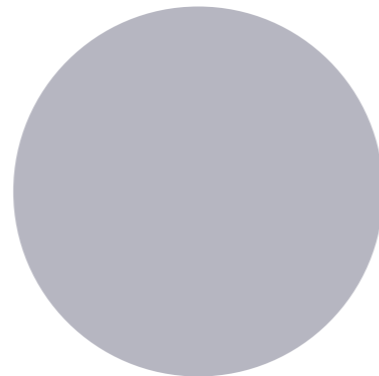
Over the course of 12 or 18 months, veterans employed at SBMC took part in a progressive employment training programme which had the aim of supporting veterans who were struggling to successfully find employment, or find employment that was suitable to their needs. Individuals on the progressive employment training programme were employed on a living wage gaining both specific vocational skills and generic skills relating to employability which are often associated with personal development and increased confidence.

Components of the progressive employment training programme included:

- Fair Recruitment Procedures (including support for unsuccessful applicants)
- Welfare and Physical Needs Assessment including Access to Work engagement
- Onboarding and Formal Induction
- Training Needs Analysis and Personal Development Plan
- On the job training and continuous assessment and self-reflection
- Employability Training

2.1.1. ROLE OF THE TRAINING MANAGER

As part of the progressive employment training programme, a Training Manager was employed to design, develop and implement a range of training and qualifications for veterans employed at SBMC. The role specifically involved gaining approval for the delivery of all accredited qualifications, delivering the training for learning for the qualifications, collating evidence for qualifications, and supporting an external training assessor. Further tasks included ensuring all policies and procedures were up to date, registering and certifying, preparing for certification, processing payments and managing budgets for the programme.



2.1.2. ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS

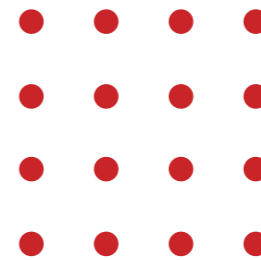
The following range of accredited qualifications were offered to veterans during the progressive employment training programme:

- NVQ 2 Performing Manufacturing Operations – Highfield Qualification
- Health and Safety in the Workplace (SCQF 4 & 5) – Nuco Training
- Fire Safety (SCQF 4 & 5) – Nuco Training
- Manual Handling (SCQF 4 & 5) – Nuco Training
- Numeracy (SCQF 2 – 6) – SQA NQ and Workplace Core Skills
- Communication (SCQF 2 – 6) – SQA NQ and Workplace Core Skills
- Information Technology (SCQF 2 – 6) – SQA NQ and Workplace Core Skills
- Working with Others (SCQF 2 – 6) – SQA NQ and Workplace Core Skills
- Problem Solving (SCQF 2 – 6) – SQA NQ and Workplace Core Skills
- Employability Award (SCQF 4) – SQA

The qualifications were specifically chosen as they offered skills that were specifically related to ICT, the manufacturing industry, and general employment-based skills (e.g. working with others, problem solving). This not only related to the type of work offered at SBMC, but also aligned with skills required for further employment elsewhere. Veterans also had the option to be signposted to other qualifications that they may be interested in through the Open University. As well as accredited qualifications, all veterans participated in SBMC Mandatory Training and RBLI Sota ICT Training (both not accredited), the components of which are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Components of SBMC Mandatory Training and RBLI Sota ICT training

SBMC MANDATORY TRAINING
Health and safety
Manual handling
Fire evacuation
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)
GDPR (data protection)
Quality Management (QMS)
Accident reporting
RBLI SOTA ICT TRAINING
Secure passwords and authentication
Cloud Security
Working remotely
Mobile device safety
Using social media safely
Public WI-FI
Internet and email use
Security at home
Internet and things
Secure email use
What makes a cyber criminal
Insider threats
Phishing attacks



2.2. SAMPLE AND RECRUITMENT

2.2.1. SAMPLE

Study participants were veterans pursuing accredited qualifications at SBMC through their progressive employment training programme. Veterans who were starting on a progressive employment training programme (of least six-months' duration), and veterans already employed at SBMC who took part in any of the accredited training opportunities were eligible. The exclusion criteria were (1) other people (non-veterans) enrolled on a programme or employed by SBMC, and (2) veterans that practitioners (SBMC) identified as being vulnerable or not capable of participating in the study.

2.2.2. RECRUITMENT

Recruitment to the progressive employment training programme occurred at the SBMC site with existing veteran employees and with new veterans when they enrolled. For those enrolling during the timescale of the independent research project, participation in the programme was also included in their job specification upon joining SBMC. Throughout this process, SBMC identified veterans who were vulnerable and/or not capable or willing to participate in the project, in line with the exclusion criteria. Veterans who met the inclusion criteria were provided with an invitation letter and participant information sheet, giving them an option to opt in or out of the research. All participants were given the opportunity to follow up with any questions throughout this process.

Challenges were faced with the recruitment of participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic that led to a significant reduction in applications for work, and the temporary closure of the factory, which restricted the ability of SBMC to enrol any new employees onto the progressive employment training programme. This also delayed the delivery of training to veterans as restrictions meant that in-person sessions could not take place. During the course of the study SBMC changed the length of the progressive training offered to veterans from 18 months to 12 months due to funding constraints.

A total of ten participants were recruited to take part in the study. Ethical approval for the study was received by Glasgow Caledonian University.

2.3. PROCEDURE

The study used a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. Short online surveys were also used to collect demographic information from veteran participants and to inform the interview questions. The study adopted a longitudinal approach in the collection of data over a one-year period to allow for analysis of any change in participant reporting. The first phase of data collection took place between March and October 2022, and the second phase took place between March and July 2023. To allow for participants to comment on their experiences of the progressive employment training programme in Phase 1, a time period of at least three months was given between starting the programme and taking part in the research.

For the purpose of the research, all participating veterans were given a unique ID number (Veteran 1-10) to ensure anonymity throughout the research process. They were not required to disclose their names at any point. At the start of data collection, seven participants were existing employees by SBMC, with periods of employment ranging from eight months to over two years. For these participants the second interview took place between 12 and 16 months after the first. Three participants started progressive employment during the study, with their first interview three to five months after starting, and the second seven months after the first. One of these participants left the organisation and withdrew from the study before the second interview. Interviews were not undertaken with any veterans after they had left SBMC.

2.3.1. QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Qualitative interviews took place at Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the data collection periods. Participating veterans were invited to take part in an online interview. In advance of their participation they were given the option to opt out or withdraw from the interview if required, and were assured that the data they provided would be stored confidentially and anonymised (using ID numbers only). Interviews took place during the participants normal working hours and were between 30 to 60 minutes in length. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

An interview schedule was developed to specifically explore the 'how' and 'why' in relation to veteran work readiness and employability; confidence levels; and mental wellbeing. Phase 1 interviews included questions based on the following:

- Demographics and background (e.g. Armed Forces branch, role at SBMC, reason for joining SBMC)
- Employability (e.g. employment history, experiences of employment as a veteran, employment choice)
- SBMC and qualifications (e.g. experiences so far)
- Work-readiness (e.g. capacity to work, feelings and interpretations of work readiness)
- Health and wellbeing (e.g. physical and mental wellbeing, confidence levels)

At Phase 2 the same questions were posed to the veteran participants. During Phase 2 interviews, participants were specifically probed on any changes that might have occurred since they were previously interviewed in Phase 1 in terms of their experiences of the programme, level of work readiness, mental wellbeing and confidence levels.

The Training Manager was also interviewed at two stages, in May 2022 and May 2023, and the Assistant Director of SBMC was interviewed in June 2023. This was to gain an in-depth

understanding of the progressive employment training programme, the context in which it was delivered, and key barriers and facilitators to delivery, and how delivery may have changed over the study period. Questions that were posed to the Training Manager and Assistant Director included:

- A description of their specific role
- The culture of SBMC as a workplace and place of learning
- The process of delivering the progressive employment training programme
- Outcomes of the programme and future plans for the programme

The full interview schedules are available to view in Appendix 1.

2.3.2. DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Veteran's demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, household information, Armed Forces branch, length of time served, reason for leaving the Armed Forces, and employment history since leaving the Armed Forces were collected using on-line forms. Participants completed this information shortly before they were interviewed at the Phase 1 and Phase 2 points of data collection. Data from surveys was used to inform each interview, with the researcher using survey responses to probe particular areas related to the demographic information provided.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS

All interview data was uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software tool NVivo. Interview data was analysed using an inductive thematic approach²⁰ where key themes emerged throughout the analysis of each interview. A coding framework was used to identify the common themes, then to draw out the specific details of each theme, and to isolate the data to evidence these points. All coding was overseen by the research team, feedback was received, and consensus was sought.

3

Findings

3.1. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic information of all participants collected by survey is shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, all of the participants were male and white British and most were over the age of 40 years. All of the participants had departed the Armed Forces at least six years before they commenced the progressive employment training programme with SBMC.

Seven participants had served in the British Army and three in the Royal Navy or Royal Marines, with varied length of service, ranging between <5 to 25 years. Reasons for leaving the Armed Forces included physical health reasons (n=2), mental health reasons (n=2), family reasons (n=3) and personal choice (n=3).

We did not collect information on specific mental health diagnoses and conditions, however it was clear from the interviews that many participants had previously sought assistance for or were currently experiencing mental health related issues, including combat related stress, addiction and anxiety.

Four participants did not report their source of income, the remaining six had varied sources including employment, pension from previous employers and benefits, with some participants deriving their income from multiple sources. All participants (one did not report) were living with a partner/spouse and two also lived with children.

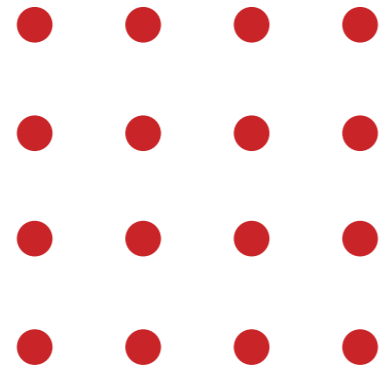


Table 2: Demographic information of all veteran participants

GENDER	Male	100% (n=10)	
	Female	0% (n=0)	
AGE RANGE	20-29	0	
	30-39	1	
	40-49	2	
	50-59	2	
	60-69	4	
	Would prefer not to say	1	
ETHNIC GROUP	White: Scottish	6	
	White: other British	4	
BRANCH OF ARMED FORCES SERVED	British Army	7	
	Royal Navy/Marines	3	
	Royal Air Force	0	
LENGTH OF TIME SERVED	0-5 years	2	
	6-10 years	1	
	10-15 years	1	
	15-20 years	3	
	20-25 years	3	
REASON FOR LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES	Physical health reason (e.g. injury, limb loss)	2	
	Mental health reason (e.g. PTSD)	2	
	Family reasons	3	
	Voluntary/personal choice	3	
	YEARS BETWEEN LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES AND JOINING SBMC	0-5 years	0
		6-10 years	1
11-15 years		4	
16-20 years		1	
21-25 years		1	
26-30 years		1	
30+ years		2	
SOURCES OF INCOME	Earnings from employment or self-employment (incl. overtime, tips, bonuses)	5	
	Pension from former employer	2	
	Child Benefit	1	
	Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit or any other Tax Credit	1	
	Would prefer not to say	4	
HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION	Live with partner/ spouse	7	
	Live with partner/ spouse and children	2	
	Would prefer not to say	1	

3.2. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY AND GENERAL EMPLOYABILITY

At Phase 1 of data collection, participants were asked questions about their employment history before commencing on the progressive employment training programme at SBMC. Eight of the ten participants had been previously employed in civilian workplaces after leaving the Armed Forces, one participant had been a 'stay-at-home parent', and one participant had been long-term unemployed due to addiction issues.

Of the eight participants who had been previously employed, workplaces included factories, call centres, driving work, labouring, building, retail and hospitality. All eight of the participants reported having been employed in multiple workplaces since leaving the Armed Forces, on either part-time, short term or temporary contracts. Most of the participants also stated that they found it difficult to find work that they enjoyed, or that was suitable to their personal needs or routines.

'I've had various little jobs.... I lasted three months in one until I chucked it.... I just had to get out of that. I was working every weekend, it was just doing me in.' (Participant 6)

'It was pretty hard to find work. All of the jobs were factory work, manufacturing. A lot of it was all agency work, so you weren't guaranteed anything.' (Participant 2)

Veterans were also specifically asked about their reasons for applying for a job at SBMC and the reasons why they were unemployed before joining. Three participants reported that they had left their previous workplace as it did not suit their physical health or disability related mobility needs.

'I just felt it was too much for me physically. I injured my knees quite badly about 10 years ago, so I've managed to keep on working but it's been a struggle at times. So, I decided to try and slow it down.' (Participant 1)

Two of the participants had struggled with employment due to combat-related stress and issues related to alcohol misuse. Nevertheless, they had been looking for roles to remain active and employable.

'Before I started at SBMC, I was on a downward spiral. I just didn't see any point in going on. So, then I guess it gave me something to do because I've always been active.' (Participant 2)

'I had two or three jobs, but my battle with alcohol intervened and so I moved about a bit (before joining SBMC).' (Participant 5)

The remaining participants all stated that they had been either made redundant or their contracts had ended at their previous workplaces, and they were all looking for something that aligned with the skills and knowledge that they already had.

3.2.1. PERCEPTIONS OF VETERANS BY EMPLOYERS

Throughout both phases of data collection, participants were asked about general perceptions of veterans by civilian employers. Participants gave mixed responses both positive and negative. Most of the participants felt that their military background was an advantage to civilian employers due to their varied skills, knowledge and work ethic. However, this perception was frequently challenged.

'I had a lot of naivety as well, like 'I'll get a job anywhere because I've been in the British Army', but that didn't happen.' (Participant 10)

Some had experiences where **employers had been resistant to employing someone from a military background** due to their previous rank or role in the Forces and associated perception of being aggressive or too assertive.

'The individual (employer) had been sheepish... because they hear that you've come from the Army, they might think that you're aggressive or tough...So, you came from an environment where it's all roughy-toughty and they don't know if you'd work well in their office.' (Participant 7)

'I was a [Chief Petty Officer] when I left (the Armed Forces), so they envisaged me as somebody who'd be shouty. I found over the years, management roles and supervisory roles have passed me by because they still see me as somebody who could upset their civilian employees.' (Participant 1)

Similarly, one respondent felt that he was **never given a chance by employers due to his combat-related mental health issues**, and negative connotations around this.

'When I left the Army, I was out of work for quite a while and one of the challenges I had was letting people let me try...I had some issues and people wouldn't let me try, and that convinced me that I wasn't able. So, I sort of gave up.' (Participant 3)

Nonetheless, three of the participants had also had positive experiences with some previous employers who had been **positive and receptive to their military background**.

'Sometimes you're looked on positively because of our work ethic. They always put stuff on you because they know you'll get it done...rather than give it to someone else.' (Participant 2)

'My last employer was really pleased that I was ex-Navy. He could see the qualities I would have, the timekeeping, the responsibility, that sort of thing, engrained into Forces people. In his eyes, a positive benefit for his company, whereas I've had other companies which were less so.' (Participant 1)

'My employer employed a lot of veterans, he actually said he would rather have 10 veterans than 20 civvies because he knew he'd get a good day's work out them.' (Participant 5)

In summary, there was a general feeling from most of the participants of not knowing what kind of response they might get from potential employers when they applied for positions, and it was very much dependent on the individual manager, company or organisation. This could also be dictated by employer's previous experience in working with or employing veterans.



3.2.2. SBMC AS A WORKPLACE FOR VETERANS

Participants were specifically asked about their perceptions and experiences of SBMC as an employer for veterans. The majority of participants stated that they had been attracted to SBMC as a workplace because it specialises in veteran employment and they would be working with fellow veterans.

'Going into somewhere where there were people who probably had similar experiences to me, whether they were Army or Navy or Air Force, was a bit of an attraction.' (Participant 1)

'I heard about the job from the British limbs charity... I was attracted to here because it's ex-soldiers, they understand the dark sense of humour and stuff like that, and they understand what the situation is (with having a combat disability).' (Participant 7)

'It's positive because I'm learning a new skill set, working with likeminded people in terms of veterans, so we all come from the same situations, and people with mental health issues. So, we all understand each other. We can all talk.' (Participant 8)

Participants also stated that they appreciated the opportunity to work with other veterans due to the camaraderie and friendship, which they had not previously found in civilian workplaces.

'It feels more like I'm coming in to see the boys than coming in to do a hard shift and I've not had a job like that in my life, I don't think, where I actually look forward to coming in.' (Participant 3)

There was also an understanding by many that SBMC was a workplace that was very supportive and trusting of their employees, which was appreciated by the veterans.

'They know what you're capable of and they let you run with it. So, if I have an idea, like with the way the water jets ran, I've created the processes of moving files around and networking the place, and they've just let me run with it and it's nice to have that trust.' (Participant 3)

'Management are easy to approach...everyone's on the factory floor and there are always people that you can speak to with their different knowledge that can resolve any issues.' (Participant 4)

Further, SBMC management was particularly sympathetic and supportive of the needs of veterans and their personal lives, especially those facing physical disability and mental health challenges.

'They're very supportive, the management...they think about the person's needs, and even people with things wrong with their legs, or they're boys who worked here I've heard that only had one arm. They're well looked after and they're very compassionate. They teach them and they don't pressurise them too much, which is good for them.' (Participant 6)

'I'm in a wheelchair, some things I do try and lift myself, but I get people who know me saying, "No, stop, we'll lift it for you", but there's always the help and assistance there.' (Participant 4)

Two of the participants stated that SBMC catered specifically to personal needs to slow down and take part in employment that was not as stressful or tiring as employment in other workplaces.

'I wanted something different. I didn't want too many responsibilities anymore. If you understand that I've been doing jobs where I've been on call for the last 30 years. I came (to SBMC) for a certain reason. I'd been looking for something to slow down and it was the perfect job for me.' (Participant 1)

Most of the participants reported that they found the work at SBMC enjoyable due to the variety of available tasks. Further, they enjoyed continually learning new skills and gaining new knowledge.

'The job's just so varied. You're not just stuck on the one thing all the time. You can move about and do different areas. It's always quite interesting. You're always learning.' (Participant 2)

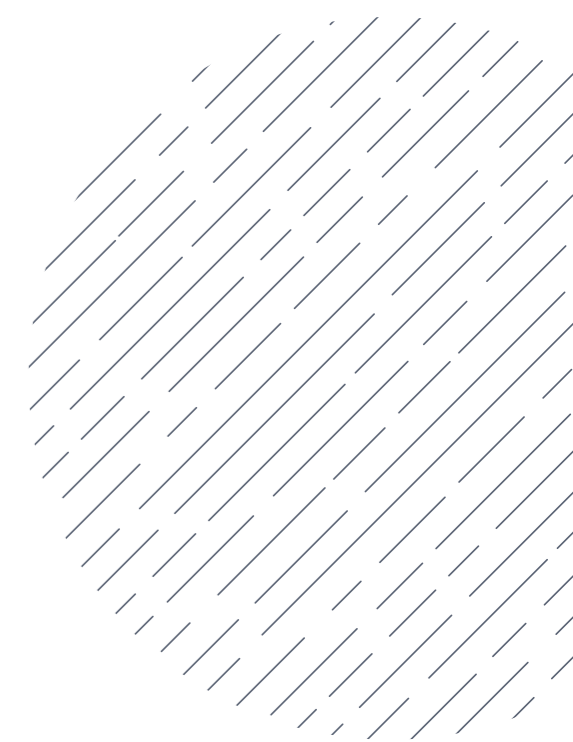
Two of the participants reported that working at SBMC has been vital to their addiction recovery in giving them a sense of purpose and making them feel valued.

'They accepted me and they gave me a chance, and I can safely say this place played a big part in saving my life because if I had gone back on the drink I'd have killed myself basically... it's played a big part in my recovery and I'm three years sober now.' (Participant 5)

In summary, the majority of participants stated that they would recommend SBMC as a workplace for other veterans seeking employment.

'Its benefits are great. There's a lot to be gained out of it if you're 100% committed, if that's what you want to do. As I say, it's a brilliant place to work.' (Participant 2)

'I love it all. It's a great place to work, a great bunch of people to work with and the job is really good.' (Participant 6)





3.2.3. ENROLMENT ON THE PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME

The training programme offered both 12-month and 18-month contract options, as well as volunteer opportunities. As shown in Table 3, when participants joined SBMC on the progressive employment training programme, seven were employed on 18-month fixed-term contracts, two on 12-month fixed-term contracts, and one participant was classed as a volunteer.

Table 3: Employment status of veteran participants pre and post programme intervention

PARTICIPANT	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	
	START OF THE PROGRAMME	END OF THE PROGRAMME
1	12-month fixed term contract	Retired
2	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
3	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
4	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
5	12-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
6	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
7	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
8	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
9	18-month fixed term contract	Permanent position at SBMC
10	Volunteer	Currently unfit for work and receiving support from veteran agencies

While the original purpose of the progressive employment training programme was to improve the overall confidence and employability of veterans within mainstream civilian workplaces, changes occurred throughout the study period. Most notably, the business capacity of SBMC became threatened due to a considerable drop in applications for advertised roles (following the COVID-19 pandemic) which meant that the business was unlikely to be able to cope with what was now a substantially busier order book.

It was felt that to move people on would have seriously undermined operations. This meant that SBMC were able to offer permanent employment for veterans enrolled on the programme. This is reflected in the fact that very few of the participants stated that they were actively seeking employment elsewhere after their time at SBMC. This was mainly due to the fact that the 12 and 18-month contracts were reasonably long, and came with an added opportunity to be employed on a permanent basis at SBMC.

In light of this, six of the participants were made permanent during the period of data collection, and stated that they had no immediate intention to seek employment elsewhere.

'I'm full-time now. So, unless this place closes down, I won't be going anywhere in the meantime...So, I'm in a very good place in terms of employment.' (Participant 8)

Three of the participants reported that they intended to retire from SBMC as soon as they reached retirement age, and would not be seeking further employment. One participant was a volunteer with combat-related mental health issues and at the point of his first interview was hoping to seek some stability at SBMC before actively seeking any further employment.

'When I left the Army, I was just going from job to job and then drink started getting in the way of everything...but I've got to grips with my problems now. So, the next thing for me is I want a job, but long-term.' (Participant 10)

Importantly, all of the participants interviewed valued the experience of taking part in the progressive employment training programme to prepare them for any eventuality where they may need to seek employment, whether imminent or in the future.

3.3. QUALIFICATIONS GAINED

The survey at Phase 1 collected information on educational qualifications that participants had already gained before joining SBMC and taking part in the progressive employment training programme. Participants could list more than one qualification, this is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Qualifications of participating veterans pre-progressive employment training programme

QUALIFICATIONS PRE-INTERVENTION (PARTICIPANTS COULD TICK MORE THAN ONE)	
School Leaving certificate, National Qualification Access Unit	3
Grade, Standard Grade, GCSE, GCE O Level, CSE, National Qualification Access 3 Cluster, Intermediate 1 or 2, National 4 or 5, Senior Certificate or equivalent	4
HNC, HND, SVQ Level 4, RSA Higher Diploma or equivalent	3
First Degree, Higher degree, SVQ Level 5 or equivalent	1
Would prefer not to say	2

The specific qualifications that participants gained during the progressive employment training programme was also recorded for progress, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Education status of veteran participants pre and post programme intervention

PARTICIPANT	INTERVIEW PHASE	SBMC MANDATORY	RBLI SOTA ICT	NUCO SCQF 5			SQA ICT					SQA NUMERIC					SQA	NVQ PERFORMING MANUFACTURING OPERATIONS						OTHER TRAINING		
				FIRE SAFETY	HEALTH & SAFETY	MANUAL HANDLING	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	WORKING WITH OTHERS	1	2	3	4	5	6			
1	1																									
	2																									
2	1																									
	2																									
3	1																									
	2																									
4	1																									
	2																									CMM and Engraving Training
5	1																									
	2																									CMM and Fire Marshall Training
6	1																									
	2																									
7	1																									
	2																									
8	1																									First Aid at work training
	2																									
9	1																									Forklift refresher training
	2																									
10	1																									
	2																									

3.4. WORK READINESS

At both stages of data collection, participants were asked questions about what they defined as work readiness, how work-ready they felt, barriers and opportunities for work readiness. At the second stage of data collection, participants were asked to comment on the impact that the progressive employment training programme had on their feelings of work readiness.

3.4.1. DEFINING WORK READINESS

Definitions of work readiness were most often provided in the context of being a veteran, and commonly described as being aware of civilian guidelines and structures that differed from the military.

'Forces personnel need to know that health and safety is part of the civilian world and you can't just knock up something to get it going. You've got to follow some sort of guidelines and rules.' (Participant 1)



'Having all your CVs and qualifications and an understanding of different sectors of what they're expecting ... and then again, the process of the interviews, and we see process of how interviews work.' (Participant 7)

In particular, work readiness was described by many of the participants as being aware of differing civilian workplace routines and expectations that veterans may not be accustomed to.

'(Work readiness is) to understand what a working day is and your breaks and your start time. You've got to be there for your start time, you've got to be there until this time, and you get X amount of breaks...that routine and that sense of what you're doing.' (Participant 5)

'You're having to get yourself up and to work and then back and then obviously your home life changes because you're settling into a new routine. I'd say routine's key.' (Participant 8)

Some of the participants also described 'work-readiness' as being related to getting used to being independent in a civilian workplace, which, for many, differed from experiences of having clear leadership in the Armed Forces.

'They've (veterans) got to be told to be on their own two feet. They're not going to get told... they're not going to have someone telling them to brush their teeth in the morning, somebody to tell them to get up in the morning, and they've got to know that there's certain things in civilian life that they've got to do.' (Participant 1)

In general, most of the participants defined being work-ready as being 'proactive', 'making an effort', and being 'reliable' and 'trustworthy'.

3.4.2. BARRIERS TO WORK READINESS (PRE-PROGRAMME)

When asked about specific barriers to work readiness and employment more generally, the majority of participants spoke of challenges they faced before they started on the progressive employment training programme at SBMC. Most notably, the majority of veterans felt that despite the skills and knowledge they gained in the Armed Forces, they had a general lack of accredited qualifications.

'For veterans and for service leavers even coming out now, some of them have got a wealth of experience and knowledge and understanding that nobody ever sat back and thought, this should be accredited. So, we talk about preparing them for moving on, we talk about preparing them to return to work as civilians, but there's no accreditation, so where's the evidence?' (Training Manager)

'I've got pages and pages of military qualifications, but they just aren't transferrable to civilian life, and I know in terms of when you use employability skills, you can say, "I did this and that etc., so that means my time keeping's good. My communication...". I mean, that only gets you so far.' (Participant 8)

Three of the participants felt that their military skills and qualifications were both not recognised and not transferable to civilian employment, which was both demotivating and frustrating.

'I'm trained to quite a high level. I did accounts, I did logistic support, I did staff support. That's working for colonels etc., like a PA, so to speak, but when I left, what happens is a lot of the military qualifications didn't translate to an SQA or an NVQ and I find that seems to be a big, big problem, especially with ex-forces.' (Participant 8)

'In the Navy, we did a lot of things but never had the civilian recognition for it. They didn't know how to compare it. Which is one of the things I found hard when I went to find a job.' (Participant 4)

There was also a recognition by two of the participants that there was a lack of pathways or opportunities to convert Armed Forces skills and qualifications into recognised accreditations.

'If there was a pathway for me to convert my current competencies to a recognised qualification, would that have made my life or made my transition from the forces to civilian life much easier? That's a definite yes, most definitely. It would have been seamless, absolutely seamless.' (Participant 8)

Participants also spoke about their lack of awareness of procedures for applying for employment in civilian workplaces, and therefore their lack of preparedness.

'I was going to apply to BT because I got my license renewed and all that, and then it got a bit like, "Please upload your CV", and I was like, "I haven't got one."' (Participant 10)

Due to a lack of qualifications or recognition of skills to gain employment in preferred places of work, or places they felt their skills best suited, some of the participants also spoke about their inability to secure employment in any workplace that may have been left as a last option.

'When I was applying for jobs, it was like, "What experience do you have?"; and I was like, "Well, I haven't got none", and they were like, "We'll be in touch", and you never heard from them again.' (Participant 10)

Therefore, in many cases barriers to work-readiness related to challenges that lay out of veterans' control, no matter how skilled or knowledgeable they may have been.

3.4.3. IMPACT OF THE PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME ON WORK READINESS

While eight of the participants who took part in the progressive employment training programme were offered permanent positions at SBMC by the time of their second interview, there was still a recognition of how the programme had made them readier and more equipped for their current role as well as wider employment opportunities outside SBMC.

For most of the participants, the qualifications were viewed as a validation and formal recognition of the skills and knowledge they already had, especially in terms of providing formal paperwork and documentation. This was seen as vital in terms of improving their CVs and making them more employable.

'The qualifications strengthen my CV and validate the skills that I've got, because without blowing my own trumpet, I am good at my job, but there's nothing that documents to say that I am actually capable or good at doing it.' (Participant 3)

'Most of us have good leadership skills, good at thinking on our feet, things like that. It's nice to have a little bit of paper that says you actually have these skills, just to go along with it.' (Participant 9)

The progressive employment training programme was also seen by the majority of participants to have prepared them for employment through learning new skills, and developing or refreshing existing skills. In some cases, this involved learning the appropriate language to describe these skills.

'It's given me some new skills that I didn't know I had... I've worked on different computers all my life and managed to learn things but she's taught me things I never knew what to do on these computers.' (Participant 6)

'I think me personally, its concreted stuff that I'd already known, I just didn't know that I knew it. The procedures that we're putting in place, I was already doing them just without knowing that they were actually called things or part of a process.' (Participant 3)

One of the participants also emphasised that the training and qualifications were not just about learning new skills, but also broadening their horizons in terms of their future career options.

'It's a chance to learn stuff, to maybe go in a different direction than you thought, to explore new things...you've got your time here, not just to learn but to see where you want to go and to work out a path for yourself...it's a chance to look at yourself and think, "Where do I want to go?"' (Participant 5)

Four of the participants saw a lot of value in training that related to manufacturing, IT and health safety as this related directly to the work they were already involved in at SBMC.

'I've learned a lot of health and safety again and I'm really refreshed with that. So, yeah, I think it could help me if I wanted to go for another employment.' (Participant 1)

'I've found it really good for me because a lot of it is computer work, and at my age my technology was the calculator. So, the IT stuff's more relevant to what I need.' (Participant 2)

In terms of gaining qualifications in health and safety, three of the participants also placed an

emphasis on the value of awareness raising of the need for formal health and safety, not only to reduce risk, but also to meet civilian expectations, regulations and guidelines.

'When it comes to the health and safety, there's a lot of things that you overlook or you don't think of until you see it on a bit of paper. Then you realize that it is actually something you've got to think about when you're out on the floor. I think that was a big eye-opener.' (Participant 3)

'Now I'm looking at the consequences, thinking of my actions, making me stop and think. Making me think more forward in that sense... I know health and safety is down to the individual all the way up through the hierarchy.' (Participant 4).

Another key impact that veterans reported was that, by gaining new qualifications and being proactive, they were showing a continued willingness to learn new things, which was seen as being of great value to potential future employers.

'Even if they don't get me a job, it shows you, you're still learning and progressing in something...They might not be worth anything to the job I go to, but at least it'll show them that I'm still progressing, still learning...they'll hopefully think, "He's a hard worker and he doesn't mind learning new things."' (Participant 6)

Similarly, two of the participants felt that in taking part in the progressive employment training programme they were becoming more knowledgeable and skilled in the processes of seeking employment and preparing themselves for civilian employment.

'She's (the training manager) taken us through applying for a job, how to use the computer, things like making a file and this stuff, bits and pieces on the computer. We've been doing that so that's been good.' (Participant 6)

'It's not just the qualification. (The training manager) touches on other aspects of it, knowing your health and safety, how you should arrive at work, and how you should be within work. So, it asks questions like, 'how do you treat your colleagues?' (Participant 8)



3.4.4. APPLICABILITY AND RELEVANCE OF PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT TRAINING PROGRAMME

Nine of the ten participants recognised limitations to the extent to which the progressive employment training programme might have impacted their work readiness. This was primarily related to the participants already having permanent positions at SBMC and having no immediate intention to seek employment elsewhere. Further, three of the participants stated that, due to their age, they would consider retirement after their time at SBMC.

Similarly, two of the participants stated that because of the length of time they had been out of the Armed Forces they had already gained enough experience of working in and adapting to civilian employment.

'I've been out the navy for 30 years. So, yeah, I don't think that I've got a problem (with work readiness).' (Participant 1)

This is reflective of the fact that all of the participants reported that they had been out of the Armed Forces for at least six years, with nine out of the ten participants having left the Armed Forces over ten years prior to joining SBMC. In this way, most of the participants felt that the progressive employment training programme might be better suited in helping younger veterans who had recently left the Armed Forces to become more work-ready.

'For a younger person coming in, it gives them some qualifications to move onto future employment.' (Participant 2)

'The training's great for (younger guys) because they'll have a better chance of further employment if they so wish to go the route of manufacturing.' (Participant 9)

'I think younger guys without the qualifications, without the experience who were going into the factory, never seen this machinery before, never worked in a production area before...the motivation would be there to do better.... The fact that they're within a group of older veterans who are going to help. We can pass down that knowledge.' (Participant 1)

This was echoed by the training manager who stated; *'Early service leavers or younger veterans. They would get more benefit, lifelong benefit from it. Not just with the NVQ, with the core skills, with the health and safety suite that we've got as well, with any other qualifications...it's a really good starting point to prepare anybody to go into employment.'* (Training Manager)

Nonetheless, what was recognised by all of the participants was the value of taking part in the progressive employment training programme to ensure that future generations could benefit from the experience.

'They (participating veterans) are planting a seed for who comes in the future, and hopefully, we'll get younger guys coming through as the business grows. They help to improve the model. If we can prove it with those guys, we can prove it with new people who are going to come along... The fact that one of our people who's just finished the diploma and is probably going to retire, but actually, we've learned an awful lot of lessons from him.' (Assistant Director)

Consequently, value was felt in piloting the programme to ensure that the model of delivery could continually be improved for veterans joining SBMC.

3.5. CONFIDENCE

Participants were asked about their levels of confidence both pre and post-progressive employment training programme (at both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of data collection) to explore any changes they may have felt during this time, and how and why changes in confidence levels may have occurred.

3.5.1. PRE-PROGRESSIVE TRAINING PROGRAMME CONFIDENCE CHALLENGES

Three of the participants reported having a general lack of confidence before taking part in the progressive employment training programme. This was most commonly related to participants having a decrease in confidence after leaving the Armed Forces and struggling to find suitable employment or adjust to a new lifestyle.

'When I was in the Army, I was a really confident person and then when you come out you try and look for different jobs and you've got to take what's there. I'm like, "I'm better than this, I'm better than this"... slowly, after a while you do start losing your confidence, saying, "Is there going to be anything out there for me?"' (Participant 2)

'...a few years ago was going to the shop and getting drink and I'm thinking, 'who's going to employ me like this?'. So, I always look at myself thinking I haven't got any qualities to give.' (Participant 10)

This loss of routine and sense of purpose was also echoed by the Training Manager when discussing the effect on veterans' lives after they leave the Armed Forces.

'One of the reasons why so many struggle when they come out...they lose that team, they lose that identity, they lose everything that they were programmed to need to survive. So, they're told what time to get up, what to eat, what time to go to bed and their days programmed for them... It's all encompassing, everything they do is about that time and that life.' (Training Manager)

The Assistant Director felt that veterans on the programme had a hidden lack of confidence or fear of failure since leaving the Armed Forces in relation to gaining employment, which was often difficult to deal with or communicate to others during their transition.

'When they're back, exposed on their own, you'll find that some of that bravado and stuff falls away quite quickly... people wouldn't necessarily like to admit there's a confidence issue. They'll use another reason to go against the plan by dismissing its viability or they're too busy with work and that sort of stuff.' (Assistant Director)
'...there's just a natural hesitancy for people to potentially expose a weakness. Maybe they feel I'm actually not as good as... whether it's IT, written work, math, whatever, numeracy, etc. A lot of the guys haven't had to face up to those weaknesses or areas for development.' (Assistant Director)

A lack of confidence was spoken about by three of the participants as a barrier to gaining employment or engaging in job-seeking activity. Nevertheless, the SBMC environment was seen by many as being conducive to confidence building in allowing for failure and weakness, which was not often seen in other workplaces. 'If you make a mistake, you don't get bothered. You don't get somebody screaming at you. You're shown, right, you've made this mistake, that's how you rectify it and that's how we go forward.' (Participant 5)

'I've never made a sign in my life and then all of a sudden, you come in here and you're all really apprehensive of what you're doing and everything looks difficult but then you find your own way. You make a few mistakes, everybody makes mistakes, but it's through mistakes you learn.' (Participant 6)

Participants stated that while SBMC was a 'job' like any other, it was different in its approach to being more understanding and tolerant of specific veteran needs, and patience for individual development at differing paces.

3.5.2. IMPACT OF ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS ON CONFIDENCE

The majority of participants reported that they got confidence from learning new skills and gaining new knowledge from the progressive employment training programme.

'Well, it's given me new skills that I never had before and the confidence to learn new skills because when I first came here, I was very, very apprehensive.' (Participant 6)

'It's given me more confidence in that I'll know all this basic stuff now and when people talk about things, I'll know what they mean and I won't have to try and embarrassingly hide the fact that I don't know.' (Participant 5)

Two of the participants reported that gaining confidence also applied to their personal lives outside of SBMC.

'I used to go to the library a lot and a lot of the online stuff, and I'd struggle with it... Filling in online forms, things like that. There are things that I don't know, and the training tells you (how to do it) ...simple things like cut and paste.' (Participant 5)

In learning new skills, and also refreshing their knowledge, two participants stated that they had a greater sense of pride in themselves and self-worth, which added to their confidence levels.

'It gave me a bit of pride in myself... if you'd asked me before, I wouldn't have known this, but I clearly didn't have any confidence... it's made me realise that inside I have got those same qualities that I thought I had, and I just don't know why I haven't been using them...I feel I've got a lot more self-worth and I've definitely got more job satisfaction.' (Participant 3)

3.5.3. WORK READINESS, EMPLOYABILITY AND CONFIDENCE

Gaining accredited qualifications gave participants a greater sense of confidence in being work-ready or more employable (see also section 3.2).

'If you don't have the qualification, then how are you meant to go for certain jobs? They've got requirements. If you've got that qualification, you've done this before, you go to any prospective employers and say, "Look, I've got this". So, automatically, you're going to be a bit more confident than somebody that doesn't have the qualifications.' (Participant 8)

'It's vastly improved my confidence. I could go somewhere and do an interview now and apply for a job, whereas I couldn't have before.' (Participant 5)

'It makes you more aware of what you do. When we were doing some of the training, I wasn't actually aware of how many roles I actually had given myself within the job. It makes you a bit more confident in that sense.' (Participant 2)

In the same way, some of the participants felt a confidence and contentedness, in their ability to actively seek other employment as a result of taking part in the progressive employment training programme.

'It's certainly managed to put in my mind that if anything did happen to SBMC I'd certainly be able to look for other employment.' (Participant 4)

'The training has affected my confidence, especially on the computers and things like that...it means I could look at other positions in a factory that uses the computer a lot. So, it opens up that...there's a lot of IT work out there.' (Participant 2)

'The qualifications are a bit of a crutch... the skills that I've learned here, I'd be able to take somewhere else... whereas previously there was no way of proving what I can do. I think that's where the SQA will help.' (Participant 3)

3.6. MENTAL WELLBEING

Participants were asked questions about the impact that the progressive employment training programme may have had on their mental wellbeing. Two of the participants found that taking part in the training and qualifications was providing a useful distraction from mental health challenges they were facing, frequently related to PTSD. In having something to occupy their minds, they felt that they were less inclined to think about their depression.

'I enjoy learning...as long as my head's learning things, as long as I feel like I'm gaining something from it, I enjoy it. I'm not very good when I'm not busy... in terms of mental health... I tend to go downhill quite quickly if I'm bored.' (Participant 1)

'I do have PTSD. That's just an ongoing thing. When I'm keeping busy in here, that dramatically helps...Just occupying my mind. Just always having something else on your mind. I think that definitely fills the void.' (Participant 3)

Taking part in the progressive employment training programme was also found to increase participants general happiness. Two participants felt that their happiness was increased by achieving something through completing qualifications.

'I'm so happy. I always come in and then when I get home, I tell her (my wife) what we've done, "I've done this today, I've done that today."' (Participant 6)

'Yes, it makes me feel happier achieving something.' (Participant 2)

One of the participants also stated that they felt increased happiness through the amount of variety that the progressive employment training programme brought to their working day.

'Head wise it's good for me...It's not often you get up in the morning and say, "Och, working again", because they change every day what we're going to do. So, there's so much variety and it is good.' (Participant 2)

Two of the participants also felt that the progressive employment training programme gave them a sense of purpose and something to look forward to for the future.

'When you get to my age, you can trundle along in the same job for years and years, so it's good to have a challenge. Just to give you a bit of get up and go and to learn new things and try and enjoy it.' (Participant 6)

'Coming here helps with what's gone on before. It's made me think of today and the future rather than yesterday and the past.' (Participant 4)

Further, taking part in training and gaining qualifications gave one of the participants increased feeling of self-worth and pride in themselves.

'It has given me a self-worth that I've not had for a long, long, long, long time because for a long time I just thought I was a bit of a bum... I wasn't working and when I did get a job it was just to put money in the bank, whereas now I feel I've got a chance of a good career (because of the programme).' (Participant 3)



3.7. DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAMME

Participants were specifically asked about the delivery of the progressive employment programme, in terms of what they thought worked well and what didn't. The following findings outline the views of participants about the delivery of the programme over the full study.

Two of the participants particularly appreciated the way that the training and accreditation element was broken down into manageable tasks by the Training Manager to make it easier.

'It's easy steps. It's not hitting you with stuff that will baffle you and make you run away...it's been quite an easy process so far.' (Participant 5)

'You can understand everything she's (the Training Manager) talking about. She does it at a nice steady pace and you can ask questions whenever you want if you're not sure of something...The Training Manager presents it very well. It's not like when you're in an exam you're pressurised all the time.' (Participant 6)

Further, two of the participants found the flexible and adaptable approach of the Training Manager useful in being able to build evidence for the veteran's accreditations while they took part in work in the factory. This meant that the accreditation was not just judged on their written or computer-based learning, but also from their experience on the factory floor.

'She's actually started taking some evidence from what I do. Like she made videos of me cleaning and doing the maintenance to the machines and things like that. So, it's an absolutely brilliant idea.' (Participant 3)

'We're actually getting recognized for a task that we're doing. She's trying to adapt our qualifications for something that we can actually get to show for what we've actually been doing as well as just explaining to a possible future employee...we'll have paperwork to show experience and the learning side as well of it.' (Participant 4)

This adaptable and flexible approach was also valuable to participants in being able to balance their work commitments around the training.

'We've got a pretty decent system here. I've got quite high demand because I feed the rest of the factory. Now that we've come up with a system where I start training at 7:30am now...So there are no distractions.' (Participant 3)

A large proportion of the participants emphasised that the success of the delivery of the programme was down to the support and encouragement of the Training Manager. In particular, her ability to understand the needs and abilities of each veteran.

'I'm sort of an old school...I used to think what do I need to learn at my age? But my attitudes changed a lot because of the Training Manager, because she's like "No, you're not too old". So, my attitude is definitely changing.' (Participant 5)

'The Training Manager always says, anything that you're not happy with or you don't understand, just come and see me, and that helps.' (Participant 4)

'I liked sitting down with the Training Manager to go over your answers. "Now, what was your thought process behind that? Why did you put that" so it's nice her noticing little things like that.' (Participant 8)

The Training Manager felt that the participants also related to her because she was the mother of a veteran, and had a level of understanding of veterans' needs and the support required. The Training Manager also emphasised the importance of building relationships of trust with the veterans over time.

'There needs to be consistency and continuity. So, not changing the goalposts on them... making sure that it's a consistent, constant approach, then that you're not going to go anywhere... you need to have a good knowledge and understanding about the veterans that you're working with and what their needs are, what their barriers are. So, really being prepared and spending that time getting to know your veterans.' (Training Manager)

The only challenge to the delivery of the progressive employment training was the ability to schedule training and learning around tasks that were required on the factory floor, and to manage the time of individual employees. This was primarily as the factory was a busy place and required the completion of orders made to specific deadlines.

'I know there've been several times when the Training Manager is looking for me, but every time she seems to come and find me, we've always been busy where we are.' (Participant 4)

'Time for me has been a bit of an issue...I'm now running the department...it's trying to squeeze it in.' (Participant 3)

'It's trying to find that time because I've got a front-facing role. So, I'm required a bit more than some of the other guys. My time's a wee bit finite...I've got meetings here or meetings there.' (Participant 8)

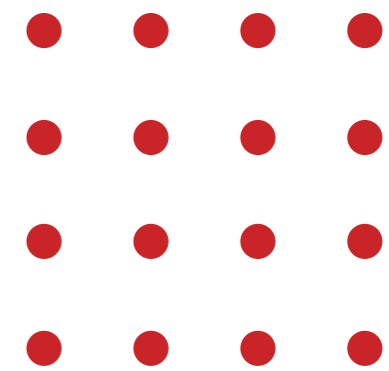
This was also echoed by the Training Manager who found it difficult at times to deliver training within a busy working factory environment.

'The difficulties of having a training centre established within a social enterprise where it's a working factory and where it's getting busier and busier and busier out there all the time. They really struggle to stop and a lot of the time their focus when they're in here is getting back out there and working... When you're getting pressured to get the product out the door from different areas, that can become the priority, rather than the training.' (Training Manager)

Nonetheless, the Training Manager was able to continually adapt the times and dates of the delivery of training and learning to fit individual needs and schedules, for example delivering training in smaller and more scattered blocks of time.

'The structures will work for a while and then I've just got to change it up a bit. Just mix it up. I've done that every three or four months, I moved their days about...I'm working a longer day. I start at half 7 and training starts at half 7... So, it's just a bit easier to get them off the factory floor at that time.' (Training Manager)

For the highlighted reasons, it was suggested early on by both the Training Manager and Assistant Director that if the programme was replicated it would be beneficial to deliver the training in a separate site to the working environment to ensure that 'lines are drawn' (Assistant Director) between training and working. However, an established way of working had been identified after trialling various models and close cooperation between training and operations meant that on-site training worked very effectively.



4

Conclusion and recommendations.

This report explored the impact of the accredited training within a progressive employment training programme at Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company's (SBMC). Collected data provided information on employability, work readiness, confidence and mental wellbeing of veterans participating in the intervention.

Our findings show that the implementation of accredited training within SBMC's progressive employment training programme had a range of positive impacts for the ten veteran participants. These included impacts that could be perceived as tangible, providing specific skills and qualifications essential to enhance the employability and work readiness of veterans, as well as other benefits of a less tangible but equally important nature. The latter included social aspects associated with veterans' wellbeing, including an enhanced confidence level and improved sense of mental wellbeing. Crucially, the research indicated that in the context of SBMC, those tangible and less tangible benefits were important in delivering a successful intervention.

Considering tangible impacts, veterans found the training and receipt of accredited qualifications valuable in providing validation of skills and knowledge they already had, that had not previously been certified during their time in the Armed Forces. Further, the training was found to help veterans learn new skills, or develop existing skills, strengthening their CV and

enhancing their chances of gaining employment in the future. Participation in the intervention also allowed veterans to show a continued willingness and commitment to learning, as a valuable attribute that could be demonstrated to potential employers. Importantly, gaining accredited qualifications and engagement in the ongoing training was facilitated by a flexible and tailored approach as well as the support and encouragement of a Training Manager. As such, our findings highlight the importance of a relevant work environment, educational processes and the role of mentors in ensuring the success of the intervention.

Gaining formal qualifications frequently facilitated the development of less tangible benefits for veterans. Our evidence points to enhanced confidence levels from learning new skills and gaining new knowledge, which simultaneously led to a greater sense of pride and self-worth. The latter was particularly important for veterans who experienced confidence issues after leaving the Armed Forces and adjusting to civilian life. Indeed, veterans participating in the intervention reported that they felt more confident in becoming employable and that gaining skills enables them to confidently seek employment due to the ability to provide potential employers with recognised accredited qualifications and certificates. Moreover, participation in the training proved to have positive wellbeing impacts on veterans who welcomed distraction from mental health

challenges and an opportunity to be involved in activities that 'keep them busy', help them to 'move on' with their lives, and develop a sense of purpose, assist in gaining a sense of achievement, support better connections with family members, bring happiness and positive outlook on a future employment journey.

Considering the contribution of this emerging evidence to the field, and the fact that the employment market may not be conducive to veterans, with many employers being hesitant to employ or delegate tasks to ex-military staff, we call for more supportive work environments for veterans and offer the following implications.

- Firstly, our research shows the importance of the delivery of flexible training and accredited qualifications that are tailored toward the specific needs of veterans who lack recognised certification. Gaining formal skills, including both basic - such as health and safety training, or more specialised - such as IT qualifications, is essential in enhancing veterans' employability.
- Secondly, that there might be different purposes of training and employability programmes for veterans: while providing training, developing new skills, and offering formal education can ensure long-term employment within as well as beyond the support organisation, in some cases providing employment opportunities to help veterans remain active and reach

retirement age might be sufficient. Also, to guarantee continuous employment, some veterans might require permanent employment and long-term job security, without being forced to search for new jobs. All these offerings are equally important and, as such, depending on circumstances, interventions should target the right veterans in the right way.

- Thirdly, to ensure a smooth transition to a civilian work environment, there is a need to target veterans who have recently left the Armed Forces and require employment support. Indeed, the lack of instant support might lead to disappointment and, thereafter, disengagement with the labour market.
- Finally, it is important to understand tangible and less tangible benefits associated with employment training programmes, with both of them being interlinked building one on another over a period of time. As such, potential policies and investments in the field should recognise the added value of the interventions that goes beyond the economic impacts of employment and incorporates social and wellbeing benefits.

While these findings are from a small-scale study of ten veteran participants, the study can be used to provide insights to policy and practice in terms of ways to strategically target funding and support for this type of intervention. Further, this study can be used to inform practitioners



working in this area (e.g. veteran companies, leaders, organisations) of the key barriers and facilitators for transition into employment (e.g. the articulation and translation of skills and knowledge). Findings also provide some practical insights into the set up and delivery of such programmes by individuals and groups seeking to set up further schemes in the future.

LIMITATIONS

While evidencing the value of taking part in the accredited qualifications to gain formal recognition of skills and knowledge, and while developing participants' CVs and enhancing their future employment opportunities, we acknowledge some limitations of the intervention as well as our evaluation. Firstly, the study is based on the responses of ten participants with specific demographic features employed at one veteran social enterprise, therefore the generalisability of findings across varied veteran employment contexts is limited. Therefore, findings may be similar to some veteran experiences, but not to all.

In terms of the delivery of the intervention, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SBMC faced difficulties in recruiting veterans to the progressive employment training programme and there were delays in delivering in-person training. Notably, SBMC has since Spring 2023 recruited three new veterans for a new 22-month manufacturing traineeship, and saw a remarkable increase in applications. These recent veteran trainees could not be included in this study due to the study timelines and the end of the interview period. This means that our findings are based on a relatively small sample size who were available to take part at the time of the study. The majority of our study participants were over 40 years old and had already been out of the Armed Forces for at least six years before commencing employment at SBMC. Nonetheless, having left the Armed Forces at least six years before, these participants will have had multiple experiences, not just military related, that has shaped their characters and approach to employment. This does impact upon the translatability of SBMC findings regarding future work readiness but also does not undermine them.

Most of the participants had already engaged in civilian employment, although the type of employment experienced by veterans had been reported as being unstable and insecure, and their choices of employment were restricted due to the lack of recognised qualifications. In addition, some participants were approaching their retirement and the perceived need of getting new employment after being employed by the SBMC intervention was limited. Interestingly, the growing demand for SBMC products and a labour shortage on the market meant that a lot of the participants were offered permanent contracts rather than the intended purpose of assistance in transition to employment elsewhere. Consequently, while the in-depth qualitative nature of the data provided rich evidence from the sampled individuals, this specific study context could have an impact on our findings and the ability to fully comment on individual transition to civilian workplaces. For these reasons, future evaluative research of progressive employment training programs would benefit from larger sample sizes, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and engaging with a wider range of veterans of different ages and backgrounds.



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In loving memory of **Jackie Johnson**



Jackie worked passionately for Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company to create a leading social enterprise that provides employment and personal development opportunities for its beneficiaries.

Her dedication to social value was unwavering, as is her lasting impact on RBLI and SBMC in particular. We are eternally grateful for the integral role Jackie played in the success of our social enterprise.

