



# Evaluation of the Ministry of Defence Spouse Employment Support Trial

## Final Report

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**Veterans & Families Institute**

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## Foreword - Ray Lock, Forces in Mind Trust

When the Ministry of Defence announced that it was to undertake a trial of a Spousal Employment Support programme, we were gratified that one of the recurring themes of our evidence on transition, that Service leavers whose spouses were already in employment tended to fare better, was being acted upon. We were also delighted to accept the Ministry's offer for us to fund an independent evaluation. Inevitably, given the limited extent, duration and composition of the trial, the evidence that our excellent research team from Anglia Ruskin University has produced is robust, but understandably perhaps not sufficiently and overwhelmingly compelling as to produce a new and significant core funding stream from within the Ministry of Defence or the Department for Work and Pensions.



Such inaction would, though, be a mistake at many levels. The eight recommendations contained within the report are based on the learning gained and the wholly positive impact on the spouses who participated in the trial. The nature of impact varied, but included not just improved 'employment readiness', but also better disposition towards life in the Armed Forces, which could reasonably be extrapolated to better retention and return of service, both to the good of the Ministry of Defence. Of course, there are arguments to be had as to whether it is proper for the benefits to accrue outside the Ministry of Defence when the costs of a full programme and perhaps an extension of training grants or learning credits would fall squarely within it.

At Forces in Mind Trust, we are not so naïve as to expect every recommendation we make to be accepted and enacted, and in particular when a tight budget would need to be further tensioned. However, we have laid a clear evidential trail that providing spousal employment support ultimately results in better transition outcomes for the Service leaver and their family. This then is our mission – to enable successful and sustainable transition – and I and all my Board would urge the Ministry of Defence to roll out such a programme, modified by the learning presented in this report, so that every Service leaver can be supported by their spouse and so live fulfilled civilian lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Lock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE  
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

## Foreword – Ministry of Defence

I would like to thank the Forces in Mind Trust for agreeing to independently evaluate the Ministry of Defence's Spouse Employment Support Trial and Anglia Ruskin University for conducting the evaluation in a thoroughly professional and academically robust manner. We realise that the family part of the equation is the backbone of support for Service Personnel and sometimes spouses and partners have gone unrecognised in this context.



We took steps to address this and to provide better support for families with the publication of our Families Strategy in January 2016; in conjunction with this we launched the Spouse Employment Support Trial in October 2015 which ran for a period of two years. The trial was offered to 200 Royal Air Force spouses at a number of RAF Stations throughout the UK and to 240 spouses within Joint Forces Command who were based in Cyprus. The Cyprus based spouses represented all three Services.

I am delighted that the independent evaluation has shown that the trial was of significant help to those spouses who participated, and that the clear majority considered that it had a positive impact on their lives. Likewise, most spouses felt the trial had increased their confidence in their current job, in seeking employment or better employment, and in applying for a promotion.

The results, outcomes and recommendations within this report are welcomed and will be considered at length by me and my team as we develop our next steps in many areas which support the Service family, with an emphasis on us supporting the individual careers of spouses and their employment opportunities. The clear message that this trial contributed to the overall sense of value that the MOD places on spouses reinforces our strongly held view that spouses and families are of significant importance to the health, wellbeing and confidence of Service Personnel, and thus the Armed Forces as a whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Nugee'. The signature is stylized and written over a light grey rectangular background.

Lieutenant General Richard Nugee CVO CBE  
Chief of Defence People, Ministry of Defence

## Executive summary

This report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) Spouse Employment Support (SES) Trial. The Trial ran from 26<sup>th</sup> October 2015 until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017 and incorporated spouses of personnel serving in the Royal Air Force (across a range of UK locations) and spouses of tri-Service Personnel serving at Joint Forces Command in Cyprus. The report addresses both the impact of the Trial on participating spouses and spouses' perceived needs for employment support.

Previous research has identified numerous challenges for spouses in connection with their employment and attempts to find work (e.g., Castaneda and Harrell, 2007). Such challenges include a lack of jobs in remote locations where the military operate, dealing with un- or underemployment, lower pay, and fewer opportunities to pursue a career (Meadows et al., 2015). The impact of these challenges has been highlighted by military spouses and organisations that support them (such as the Army Families Federation), and is reflected in the fact that 'spouse employment' is consistently listed in MOD surveys (i.e., the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey [AFCAS] and the family version [FAMCAS]) as one of the main reasons why Service Personnel will consider leaving the military.

In response to the need for provision of employment support, the MOD launched a new Spouse Employment Support (SES) Trial in 2015, to help spouses optimise their access to employment and to help them find better employment at a level that is commensurate with their skills, knowledge and experience and/or in accord with their aspirations and ability. Spouses participating in the Trial were given access to job readiness support in the form of careers counselling and workshops, as well as a training grant up to the value of £879 with which to pursue employment-related training in their chosen field.

Anglia Ruskin University conducted the evaluation of the SES Trial in order to understand the impact of employment support for military spouses. During the evaluation, we surveyed spouses taking part in the Trial with regards to their job readiness, well-being, and opinions of the support they received. We also sought in-depth feedback from spouses and their serving partners through a series of one-to-one interviews.

Findings of the evaluation indicate the important role of employment support in building spouses' confidence in job-seeking, developing their skills and qualifications, and enhancing their potential employability. For instance, 67% of spouses felt more confident in their ability to obtain work as a result of participating in the Trial, 78% agreed the Trial had had a positive impact on their lives, and 80% would recommend the Trial to others. Spouses valued highly the training opportunities that they were able to access through the Trial, and viewed these as a crucial aspect of the support package they received. Whilst we were unable to show any impact of the Trial on spouses' and their serving partners' desires to remain in the military (the retention factor), one notable finding was that spouses reported feeling valued and invested in by the military as a result of the Trial. Feedback from spouses regarding the support they received on the Trial was largely positive, with negative feedback primarily focusing on 'process'

frustrations, such as delays in accessing support or training grants and occasional difficulties in contacting support staff in the UK-based arm of the Trial.

## Recommendations

**The outcomes of the evaluation suggest that the Trial had a positive impact on meeting the employment support needs of military spouses.**

**Recommendation 1:** One of the repeated themes throughout the evaluation was the impact of the MOD recognising military spouses as individual agents in their own right. It is recommended that the MOD should continue to provide support and assistance to help military spouses into the employment market, via the embedding of the Trial into practice as usual. This support does though need to be nuanced to take into consideration accessibility: more online and distance training opportunities should be made available.

**Recommendation 2:** An indirect effect of the Trial was the establishment of a stronger relationship between the spouses and the military institution. The availability of the Trial provided a sense of reciprocity for the career compromises military spouses felt they had made in order to enable their serving partners' careers. If it is not possible to provide the same provision as in this Trial, the MOD should consider other mechanisms and policy initiatives that recognise the contributions and sacrifices made by military spouses.

**Recommendation 3:** The evaluation highlighted some of the barriers that military spouses felt both impacted on their ability to take part in the Trial and on their ability to obtain employment in general. The findings indicate the importance of appropriate and easily accessible childcare and transport provision, especially for military families who are in remote or isolated postings, and these are key tenets of the MOD Family Strategy (MOD, 2016). If the MOD is unable to provide these resources directly, consideration should be given to how these services could be improved for military families. Collaboration with local community services, such as Local Authorities, charities or other public sector provision, should be prioritised.

**Recommendation 4:** Self-efficacy and choice for the spouse, through the provision of a training grant, was shown to be one of the biggest motivators and positive influences of the Trial. It is recommended that the MOD continue to provide training grants to spouses.

**Recommendation 5:** Alongside dedicated training grant provision, other mechanisms to enable spouses to choose and manage employment-related training opportunities should be considered. These could include enabling spouses to access employment training opportunities that are available to their serving partner, or the development of a mechanism for joint access to learning credits.

**Recommendation 6:** There are a number of organisations offering employment support and advice to military spouses, some of whom are listed in appendix 2. The results of the survey suggest that there was not a particularly high utilisation of these important resources by the Trial participants. It is recommended that these

organisations and the MOD work together to ensure that spouses are aware of the provision and support available.

**Recommendation 7:** Underemployment and underutilisation of skills that military spouses bring to employers was a theme in this research. It is recommended that employers consider more flexible employment arrangements to mitigate the impact of mobility and the military lifestyle thus capitalising on this important resource.

**Recommendation 8:** The evaluation of the Trial has shown that it had an overall positive influence on the participants and helped to improve their confidence within the job market. It is recommended that further longitudinal studies are carried out to understand the legacy of this Trial on those who participated and importantly to see whether the provision of spouse employment support has any impact on retention or successful transition out of the military.

## Background

The UK military is adapting and updating the offer it provides to the families of its employees. The changes being made are in recognition of a shift in the profile of Service Personnel. There is wide recognition of the importance of the military family as a unit. Such importance is reflected in academic research, in the development and implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant (MOD, 2017) and through the publication of the recent UK Armed Forces Families Strategy (MOD, 2016). The delivery of the Armed Forces Covenant is subject to Parliamentary debate (Hansard Online, 2017) and scrutiny (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017), and how military families are supported - including understanding the employment needs of spouses - is a matter of political interest. This is echoed by the comments of Rishi Sunak (MP for Richmond, Yorkshire):

*My final point is about spousal employment. Fifty per cent of military personnel already cite the impact on their partner's career as making them more likely to leave the services. The reason is that the husbands and wives of Britain's servicemen and women represent a deep reservoir of talent that all too often goes untapped. That is a problem not only for families but for our economy, which is missing out on some of our nation's most able and resourceful citizens. (Hansard Online, 2017)*

## Challenges to spouse employment

Military spouses experience a number of challenges by the nature of the military lifestyle. These include frequent deployment and non-deployment separations from their serving spouse, assuming primary responsibility for childcare and household affairs, limited education and poor employment history, frequent relocations, and serving spouses' long and erratic working hours (Castaneda and Harrell, 2008; Maury and Stone, 2014). Military spouses often find it difficult to secure suitable employment that is flexible to their circumstances. Running the family home on one income can in turn lead to financial constraints for military families. Spouses may experience feelings of frustration and low self-esteem due to the low earning potential of the jobs that are available, or being unable to fulfil their potential in terms of employment and career. Indeed, spouse unemployment and underemployment has been linked to lower psychological well-being and reduced quality of life compared to their employed counterparts (Trewick and Muller, 2014). These factors may affect the relationship with the serving partner and put additional strain on them, as well as on the whole family. Indeed, given that academic research has established a clear link between the employment status of military spouses and factors such as their education, health, well-being and quality of life (Castaneda and Harrell, 2008; Harrell et al., 2004; Trewick and Muller, 2014), such challenges are important ones to address.

Employment support for military spouses has been identified by a number of sources including the Forces in Mind Trust (see Sondergaard et al., 2016), MOD (see AFCAS, 2016), and published academic research (see following section) as a core unmet need among Service families. In particular the 2016 Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) listed problems with spouse/partner employment as a key factor influencing intention to leave the Services among 49% of respondents. The MOD has acknowledged the importance of this issue by including 'partner employment' as one of seven key pillars in the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2016-2020 (AFCAS, 2016).

## Military spouse employment: an overview of published literature

In couples where the spouse is a civilian, they would normally be expected to move every few years, following their serving partner from posting to posting (Savage, 2010). Following the terminology of Segal (Segal, 1986), the military and the family are both "greedy" organisations, and as such are in competition with each other as they both seek loyalty, commitment, and priority of the serving member's time, resources and availability. Often the military emerges as the predominant force and as such, civilian partners are often left to face the challenges that are presented by a military lifestyle unsupported, including frequent relocations, long periods of separation, lack of support, low (if any) pay, long periods as a de-facto single parent, and substantial uncertainty and worry during periods of deployment (Taber, 2009). In the UK military, at some stage, most military families are subject to regular relocation and are often required to move to where the serving partner is posted (Rowe et al., 2014). Sometimes, if the family are home owners and do not wish to disrupt the permanence of their children's schooling, the family will remain at home and endure the challenges that this separation brings (CSJ, 2016).

### Factors limiting employment for a military spouse

There are many potentially destabilising factors in the life of a military spouse. There are frequent changes of address for the entire family, and as a consequence, an unpredictable and uncertain future. These are the result of their serving spouse's working life, who may be unexpectedly called to active frontline duty, with no certainty of when, or even if they will be returning. Also as military personnel normally change bases every couple of years, it can be hard to plan for, or realise, a long term and fulfilling career. In the UK military, the number of moves vary between the forces, with Royal Navy families moving the least, if at all, and the Army moving the most, with the Royal Air Force (RAF) in between the two (FAMCAS, 2016). In spite of these difficulties and complicating factors, many military spouses wish to, and in fact do work outside of running the home and managing their families (Castaneda and Harrell, 2008). As indicated by Lim and Golinelli (2006), in the US military, up to 70% of military spouses are in paid employment, or are actively seeking it, though many remain unemployed by choice given the limitations they face. In the UK military, overall 72% of spouses are

employed, with Army spouses having the highest unemployment rate of 33%, and the Royal Navy and the RAF approximately the same unemployment rate of 23%. Additionally, the Army has the lowest number of spouses in full-time employment (37%), while the RAF has the highest (49%) (FAMCAS, 2016).

Relocation to a new base can lead to difficulties progressing to more senior positions in their chosen jobs, and while some may be able to transfer to the new area within their organisation, or arrange to work from home, most cannot. This leads to non-transferable skills and work experience (Castaneda & Harrell 2008). Relocation to a new and unfamiliar area where the employment market may be limited or not aligned with the skills and experience of military spouses, can leave them at a disadvantage. Also, in terms of career progression, many companies and organisations are not willing to employ someone in a more senior role, if they will be moving on in a couple of years. The transient nature of the military spouse can create bias that prevents their employment, even if they have the necessary skills, experience and ambition to become productive contributors to the organisation. Some employers believe that they are only seeking part-time work, and cannot commit full-time to the organisation due to their role as 'pseudo single parents' (Burrell, 2006). Other organisations do not want to commit the necessary resources to train an employee who will be moving on in two or three years, and those that do employ military spouses, do not see them as having a future with the company as it is understood that their first loyalty lies with the military organisation, which limits the possibilities for career progression, promotion or advancement beyond entry levels (Booth, 2003). This means that the military spouses that do enter employment are often not able to improve their skills and experience in line with other employees. What is more, frequent geographic relocation leads to them seeking certain types of jobs with shorter training periods, and lower prospects for promotion (Hosek, 2013).

Given these limitations, Hosek et al. (2013) found that military spouses with a higher or university education are less likely to work full-time than their civilian counterparts, and overall, periodic relocations of military families have negative impacts on the training and employment of the military spouse, compared to civilian spouses.

In terms of comparing the wages and earnings of a military spouse to a civilian spouse over the period of their careers, Booth (2003) found that military spouses can earn up to 20% less than non-military spouses. Studies in the US have shown that college educated military spouses earn 16% less than similar civilians, and that high school educated military spouses earn 11% less than their civilian counterparts. Other research has shown that "the wage of the military spouse is lower at every age than the wage of the civilian spouse" (Hosek et al., 2013). Possibly, this is due to the military spouses' difficulty in attaining a senior roles, which leads to a vicious cycle of less opportunities for training and career progression (Payne et al., 1992). . Another possible limiter of military spouses' earnings is the type of employment they are able to obtain. Employment that is available in the local area and flexible or part-time to fit in with what the military spouse is able to commit to, is often in the services or retail sectors, which normally have lower wages than other sectors (Booth, 2003; Harrell et al., 2004).

Another important consideration is the job search time of the military spouse. On average it can take the military spouse about ten months to find a new position after relocation to a new base. This leads to less time in employment, lower earnings and long gaps on their CV (Payne et al., 1992).

With regards to education, military spouses have been found to be better educated than their civilian counterparts, where approximately 38% of civilian spouses have some university education, whereas this figure is over 50% for military spouses (Friedman et al., 2015). The group with the highest wage differential are the spouses of low ranking enlisted members, who tend to have lower education than officers' spouses, and their serving partners also earn less. As such, it is these military families who most need the spouse to be in paid employment, but they are also the most likely to be in lower paid jobs. Despite higher levels of education, Officers' spouses also earn less than comparable (education, age, location) non-military spouses (Harrell et al., 2004).

Many of these factors around employment and career advancement not only impact on the military spouse, but also affect the military family and consequently the military as an institution. Military spouses who are not satisfied with their career options may encourage or put pressure on their serving partners to leave the Service. This was highlighted by the work of Harrell et al. (2004), who found that "spouse influence on military retirement or resignation decisions has increased with the rate of military spouses working outside the home". This reinforces the suggestion that if the tendency for military spouses to seek paid employment continues to increase, then the numbers of military Service Personnel may decrease, unless military spouses are afforded suitable job opportunities. As we move towards a changing model with regards to the support the military gives to military families, especially in areas such as healthcare and housing, this may become more and more important.

There are a variety of potentially limiting factors that affect a military spouse's job prospects, earnings and career progression. Overall, they are disadvantaged when compared to civilian spouses who are comparable in terms of age, education, location and family composition. The military spouse is likely to have greater difficulty finding suitable paid employment, may be less valued employees and receive less training and continuing professional development, and they will probably also be paid less. Furthermore, the fact that they cannot gain meaningful remuneration, may lead to pressure on the military family as a unit, and encouragement of the serving member to leave the military (Little and Hisnanick, 2007).

### Employment status, quality of life, health and well-being

Research has established a link between a military spouse's employment and education and their health, well-being and quality of life (Castaneda and Harrell, 2008; Harrell et al., 2004; Trewick and Muller, 2014). It is important to consider previous work relating to resilience or coping strategies that are put in place by those that face frequent

geographical relocation, the broken support networks that this leads to, and explore the importance of factors such as isolation and loss associated with being a military spouse.

Further issues affecting military spouses are the challenges presented by the nature of the military lifestyle itself. With frequent, non-deployment separations, spouses' long hours, and their own limited education and poor employment history, along with their primary responsibility for childcare and household affairs, enlisted military spouses often face an ongoing struggle to find suitable employment that is flexible to their circumstances (Maury and Stone, 2014). These constraints can have impacts at all levels of family life. Often there are financial constraints where there is insufficient, or very limited money to run the family home. These are often confounded by feelings of loss of identity and low self-esteem in military spouses due to the low earning potential of the jobs that are available, or that they are unable to fulfil their potential in terms of employment and career (Blakely, 2014).

In terms of finances, it has been shown that self-worth, self-esteem, and independence are established in spouses by their ability to contribute financially to their households (Hosek and Wadsworth, 2013; Kroska, 2008). Castaneda and Harrell's (2008) mixed methods research provides an overview of just how important, both emotionally and financially, paid employment is to military spouses. Many spouses reported their motivation to work as a means to financially contribute to their households, while others sought personal fulfilment through work. Additionally, Wood et al. (1995) found a correlation between spousal military satisfaction and the reenlistment of the service member in the land army. Their findings indicated that the most important attribute to spousal military satisfaction is being employed, which leads to positive spousal well-being, a strong sense of self, and self-esteem.

### Childcare and education

With regards to childcare, in the US military, the National Military Family Organisation (2007) offers a variety of data from their 2007 spouse education survey of almost 8000 spouses, which they summarised in a series of recommendations from participants and the organisation. Perhaps unsurprisingly they called for more government-sponsored childcare for military families. In the UK, non-serving partners are responsible for childcare while their serving partners are deployed, which puts considerable strain on the non-serving partner and is a key factor preventing military spouses from finding suitable employment. They find themselves disadvantaged in that they cannot afford formal childcare, and given that they often live away from their established network of family and friends, they may also lack this informal support (Castaneda and Harrell, 2008; CSJ, 2016).

In the same National Military Family Organisation survey, 37% of participants responded that being a military spouse affected their education pursuits and status, with 25% reporting negative outcomes such as temporary and long-term education delays or having to abandon their career aspirations completely. Recommendations

included the establishment of measures to address spouse employment training as well as systems to support education and training.

### Background summary

In the face of a changing military family model, there are specific demands and opportunities of the modern military organisation and the complex and dynamic relationship within military families, especially in the context of the military spouse.. Due to the nature of their relationship with serving partners, they share many of the same military lifestyle challenges that affect many important areas of their lives including where they live, their education and training, and their employment and careers.

The military family is often seen as integral to the support of serving men and women. As such, developing a better understanding of the factors surrounding the employment activity of the military spouse, including the complex dynamics, varied roles, and conflicting priorities, will broaden our awareness and understanding of the best strategy to ensure their contribution to the military family unit, as well as their health and well-being. This may in turn improve the relationship between the military family and the military as a whole.

## The Spouse Employment Support Trial and Evaluation

In response to the recognition of the importance of spouse employment and the challenges around it, in October 2015 the MOD initiated a two-year Spouse Employment Support (SES) Trial. The Trial was open to 200 spouses of RAF personnel stationed across the UK and 240 spouses of personnel working within Joint Forces Command (JFC), Cyprus. The primary purpose of the Trial was described as ‘to help spouses optimise access to employment and to help them find better employment at a level that is commensurate with their skills, knowledge and experience and/or in accord with their aspirations and ability’ (MOD, 2014).

The Trial was delivered by Right Management Ltd as an element of the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) contract. Service Personnel from the RAF in the UK and JFC in Cyprus provided Administration for the Trial and acted as points of contacts for the spouses on the Trial. CTP is an employment readiness and job finding service available to UK Service Personnel as they exit the military, and for the purposes of the Trial, this programme was adapted for the spouses of personnel who were still serving.

The Trial consisted of two main elements:

- 1) Job readiness and career support (similar provision to the support that Service Leavers receive from CTP when exiting the military).
- 2) Training grant up to the value of £879 for spouses to pursue training and skills-based qualifications in their chosen field of employment.

In order to understand the impact of participating in the Trial on military spouses’ employment prospects, the Forces in Mind Trust commissioned Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) to conduct an independent evaluation of the SES Trial, which commenced in February 2016.

The evaluation sought to address the following key research questions (RQs):

- RQ1:** What are the employment support needs of spouses of Service Personnel?  
**RQ2:** What is the capacity of the SES Trial to meet spouses’ employment support needs?  
**RQ3:** How does the SES Trial influence Service families’ preparations for, and experiences of, transition from military to civilian life?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, we focus predominantly on questions one and two. The data we collected from Service families was too varied and inconclusive to be able to determine the influence of the Trial on families’ transition preparations and experiences. Accordingly, whilst we make brief comments on transition in this report, detailed reflections on question three will be the subject of a forthcoming academic paper.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants were recruited from the 435 UK military spouses who took part in the SES Trial (240 from Joint Forces Command in Cyprus and 195 from the Royal Air Force in the UK). Spouses (including civil partners) could apply to take part if they were employed, self-employed, unemployed or currently in training. To be eligible to take part the serving partner needed to have served at least six years in the Armed Forces (spouses of full-time Reservists, Wounded, Injured and Sick, and Foreign and Commonwealth Service Personnel could apply). Additionally, spouses had to meet the following eligibility criteria to take part.

In the UK:

- a. Spouses accessing the Trial must be residing in the UK at the point of application.
- b. Service Personnel should expect to serve at their current unit for a period of at least six months at the point of application.
- c. Service Personnel must not be in their last two years of service at the time of application.

In Cyprus:

- a. Spouses of Cyprus-based Service Personnel who serve unaccompanied were not able to apply.
- b. All spouses could apply regardless of which Service branch their serving partner serves under.

Whilst 435 spouses signed up to the Trial, only 325 had engaged with the Trial support (i.e., had further contact with CTP) by March 2017. This date was used as a cut-off point to ensure all participants could complete the second set of questionnaires (T2: six months after T1) by November 2017. Only participants who engaged with the Trial following initial registration (n=325) were invited to take part in online evaluation surveys and questionnaires (described below in the Measures section). Those who did not engage with the Trial following initial registration were considered not to have started the Trial and were not included in the evaluation.

A sub-sample of spouses were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews to provide a more in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the programme. A total of 30 spouses took part in interviews, including 13 from the UK and 17 from Cyprus. Participants were identified using a purposive sampling strategy<sup>2</sup> in order to reflect diversity among spouses across a number of categories including location (Cyprus/UK), branch of service (Army/RAF), and rank subset (commissioned/enlisted). Additionally, a total of 23 Service Personnel with spouses taking part in the Trial (11 in the UK, and

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<sup>2</sup> Participants were actively chosen to create a representative sample.

12 in Cyprus) were interviewed as part of the evaluation and were sampled in the same manner as the spouses.

Focus groups were conducted with the staff in charge of coordinating the Trial in the UK (n=2), in Cyprus (n=2), and the project managers at central MOD headquarters (n=2). These were conducted in order to understand the administration processes of the Trial, to identify any issues in the operation of the Trial, and to receive feedback from the perspective of the Trial's managerial team.

Demographic data from the spouses and their serving partners were obtained from the application forms. This data is presented in the Results section below.

## Data collection

This evaluation is based on evidence collected via qualitative and quantitative means. Each form of data collection is described in further detail below:

### Questionnaires

Spouses were asked to complete the following online questionnaires at two points, T1 (eight months after beginning the Trial) and T2 (six months after T1).

The measures used were as follows:

- The Job Search Self-Efficacy (JSSE; Saks, Ziznik and Koen, 2015) questionnaire measures an individual's belief that they can successfully perform specific job search behaviours and obtain employment. It consists of two scales which differentiate between job search behaviours (JSSE-B) and job search outcomes (JSSE-O).
- The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) is commonly used to measure feelings and functioning aspects of mental well-being.
- An additional evaluation survey with MOD-designed questions was sent out at T2. This asked for feedback on the Trial itself and included questions about participation in the Trial, feedback on support received and the impact the Trial has had.

### Interview protocol

Interview guides were developed collaboratively by the research team. Separate protocols were developed for the spouses and Service Personnel. Questions were used as prompts for further discussion and covered participants' background, employment support needs, feedback on the Trial and its impact, as well as broader discussions on satisfaction with military life and intentions of staying in or leaving the military.

Interview guides were also developed for the Trial staff, where questions centred on the practical aspects and challenges related to the implementation and running of the Trial.

## Procedures

### Ethical approval and consent

Ethical approval for the evaluation was given by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee at Anglia Ruskin University. Ethical approval was sought from the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee, who made the decision that the evaluation of the Trial constituted a service evaluation and as such did not require research related ethical approval.

During registration for the Trial, spouses were asked to confirm their consent to taking part in an evaluation of the programme. Prior to any contact from the research team, CTP sent out an email to all spouses to inform them that researchers from ARU would be in contact to invite them to take part in the evaluation. Consent to take part in the online questionnaire was assumed from spouses completing the questionnaires. Participants who were invited to take part in the interviews were provided with an information sheet outlining the evaluation and the interviews, and asked to sign a consent form if they were happy to take part.

### Questionnaires

Following the introductory email from CTP, researchers from ARU sent out emails to spouses to invite them to complete the online questionnaires at two time points. Only spouses who engaged with the Trial by March 2017 were invited to take part in the questionnaires (n=325) to make sure all participants who were invited to complete the questionnaires at T1 were able to complete the T2 questionnaires before the end of data collection in November 2017.

For the 200 spouses who started the Trial before September 2016 the online questionnaires were sent at the eight month point (T1) and again after a further 6 months (T2) to ascertain whether the taking part in the Trial has had any effect on well-being and job search self-efficacy, and to gain feedback on the Trial.

Due to time restraints for completing the evaluation, the remaining 125 spouses who began the programme between September 2016 and March 2017 were sent out the T1 questionnaire in May 2017 (varying from two to eight months after beginning the Trial). This was to ensure these spouses had the opportunity to complete the T2 questionnaire by the end of data collection in November 2017 (six months later).

Participants were sent weekly reminder emails for three weeks (i.e., an initial email followed by three reminder emails) to encourage them to complete the online questionnaires.

### Interviews

Figure 1 shows the procedure for contacting participants to invite them to take part in the interviews.

## Procedure for contacting participants

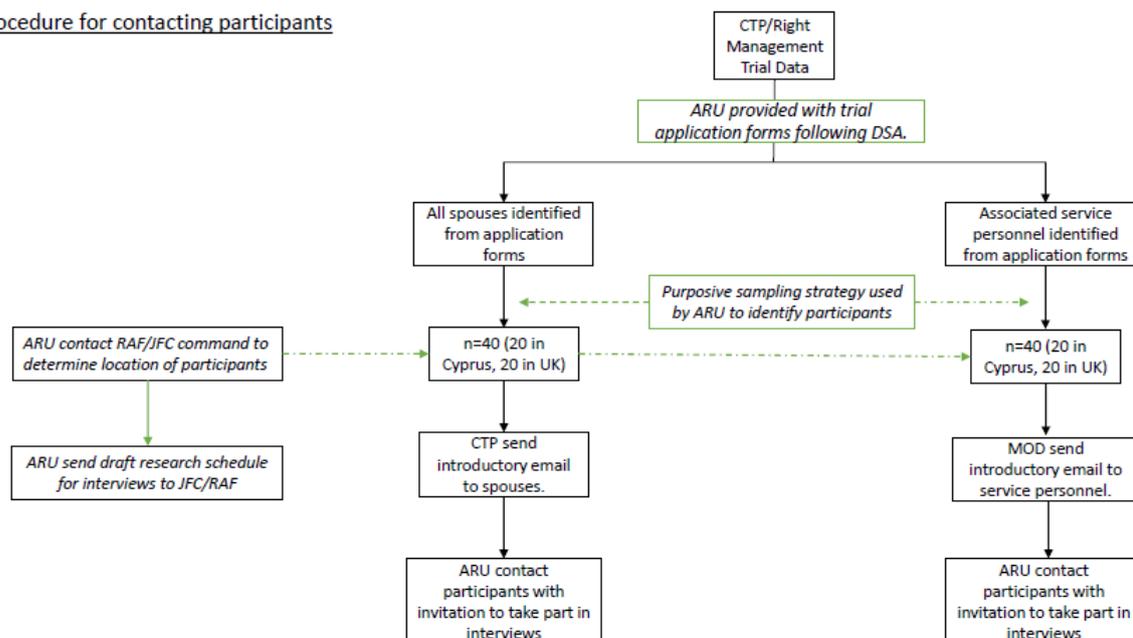


Figure 1. Procedure for contacting potential interview participants.

Interviews took place on military bases in the UK and Cyprus. The project managers were interviewed at MOD headquarters. Participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the evaluation (including procedures for maintaining confidentiality and right to withdraw from the study), and were asked to sign a consent form before taking part. Interviews were recorded for the purposes of transcription and lasted an average of 29 minutes for Service Personnel, 37 minutes for spouses and 61 minutes for Trial staff.

## Data analysis

**Quantitative analysis:** Demographic data was taken from the application forms and input into a statistical analysis software package (SPSS). This data is presented below using frequencies, means and percentages. Data from the questionnaires was downloaded from the online survey tool (Lime Survey) and input into SPSS for analysis. Mean scores for each questionnaire are presented below and are stratified by location (Cyprus and the UK) and time point (T1 and T2). Paired-sample t-tests were used to look for changes in well-being and job search self-efficacy between time points in those spouses who completed the questionnaires at both T1 and T2. UK and Cyprus-based spouses were combined for this analysis and in the presentation of the Value-Added Questions due to the low number of matched pairs in each location, which would have limited the statistical power to detect any differences.

**Qualitative analysis:** The interview data were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into a qualitative data analysis software package (NVivo). Data were then submitted to a

rigorous thematic analysis following the widely used procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process provided core thematic material related to participants' experiences and the impact of the programme, and consisted of six stages:

- 1) Data familiarisation: Transcribing, reading and re-reading the data for content familiarity.
- 2) Generating initial codes: Systematically coding interesting features of the data and collating data relevant to each code.
- 3) Searching for themes: Grouping codes into potential themes, collating all data relevant to a particular theme.
- 4) Reviewing themes: Confirming that themes make sense in relation to codes and overall data set, producing a 'thematic map' of potential themes.
- 5) Defining and naming themes: Refining the specifics of each theme, clarifying content of themes and giving each theme a clear name, describing the overall 'story' the analysis tells.
- 6) Producing the report: Detailed presentation of the evidence underpinning each theme, selection of vivid and compelling data extracts to illustrate themes.

## Demographic overview of Trial participants

The following presents a demographic overview of participants in the SES Trial in Cyprus and the UK. Data are provided on the ages, locations, and education levels of spouse participants, rank of their serving spouses, and the economic categories spouses indicated on their application forms (i.e., unemployed seeking work, employed seeking betterment, or economically inactive).

### Cyprus

In the Cyprus arm of the Trial, 240 spouses signed up to take part in the Trial<sup>3</sup>. Of these, 91.2% were British (other nationalities included: American, Bulgarian, Cameroonian, Danish, Estonian, Fijian, German, Hungarian, Irish, Malawian, Nepalese, Nigerian, Polish, Spanish and Swedish). Spouses had a mean age of 35 years (ranging from 21 to 59). The majority of spouses had serving partners in the Army (60%), followed by the RAF (37%) and the Royal Navy (3%). The majority of spouses in Cyprus were based on the South side of the island (Episkopi and Akrotiri), shown in Figure 2 below.

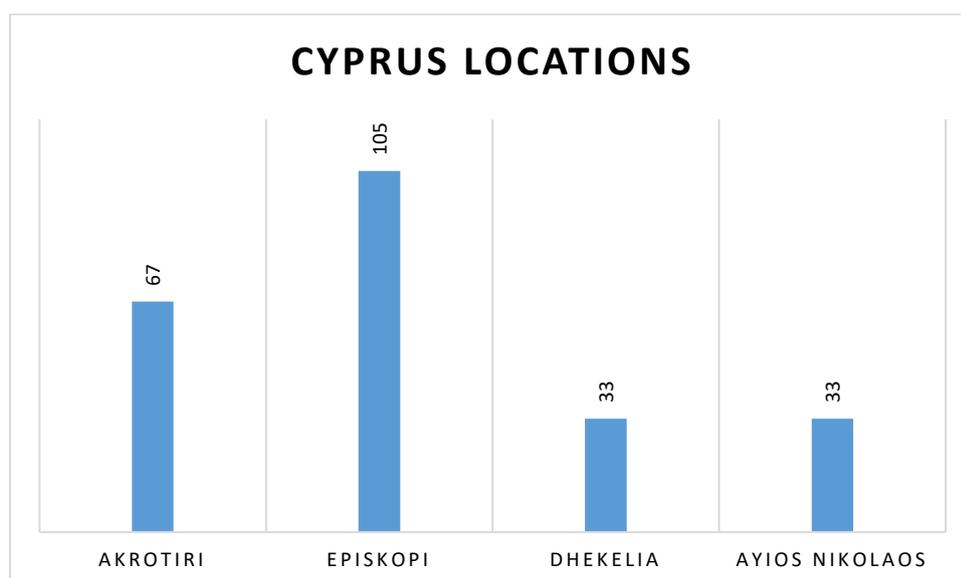


Figure 2. Number of spouses in each location in Cyprus.

### UK

In the UK-based arm of the Trial, 195 spouses signed up to take part in the Trial. Of these, 96.9% were British (other nationalities: American, Canadian, Dutch and Romanian). All spouses in the UK had serving partners in the RAF. Spouses had a mean age of 36 years (ranging from 22 to 55). The number of spouses in each region of the UK is shown in Figure 3 below and the number in each RAF base is shown in Table 1. This suggests that the majority of spouses on the UK-based arm of the Trial were based in the West Midlands, and the East/South East of England.

<sup>3</sup>However the authors only had access to 238 spouses' application forms at the time of analysis.

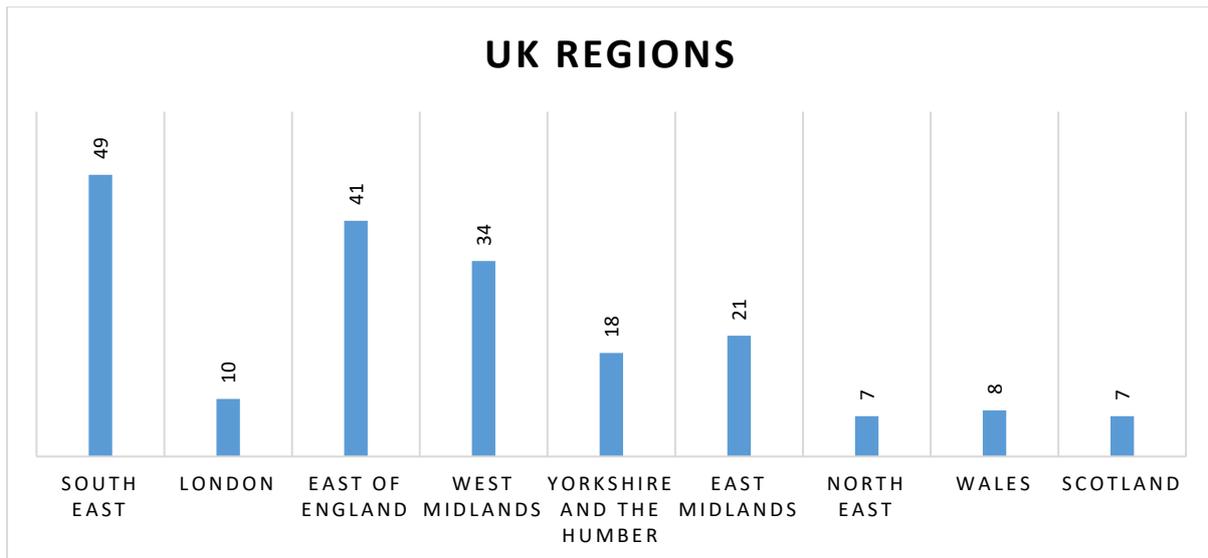


Figure 3. Number of spouses in each region of the UK.

UK Region	RAF Station	Number of Spouses
South East (n=49)	Benson	16
	Brize Norton	12
	Halton	7
	High Wycombe	8
	Odiham	6
London (n=10)	Northolt	10
East of England (n=41)	Honington	27
	Marham	2
	Wittering	12
West Midlands (n=34)	Coningsby	8
	Cosford	18
	Shawbury	8
Yorkshire and the Humber (n=18)	Fylingdales	1
	Leeming	11
	Linton	6
East Midlands (n=21)	Cranwell	5
	Digby	4
	Scampton	3
	Waddington	9
North East (n=7)	Boulmer	7
Wales (n=8)	Valley	8
Scotland (n=7)	Lossiemouth	7

Table 1. Number of spouses in each location in the UK.

## Rank and education

In the UK-based Trial there was a higher percentage of spouses with commissioned serving partners compared to Cyprus. This difference reflected the higher percentage of officers compared to other ranks in the RAF in the UK (22% officers, 78% other ranks), compared to JFC in Cyprus (11% officers, 89% other ranks)<sup>4</sup>. However, as shown in Figure 4 this disparity between the proportions of officers to other ranks is increased between the UK and Cyprus-based arms of the Trial, suggesting that RAF officers' spouses were overrepresented in the UK. These differences are important in as much as they have a bearing on employment opportunities.

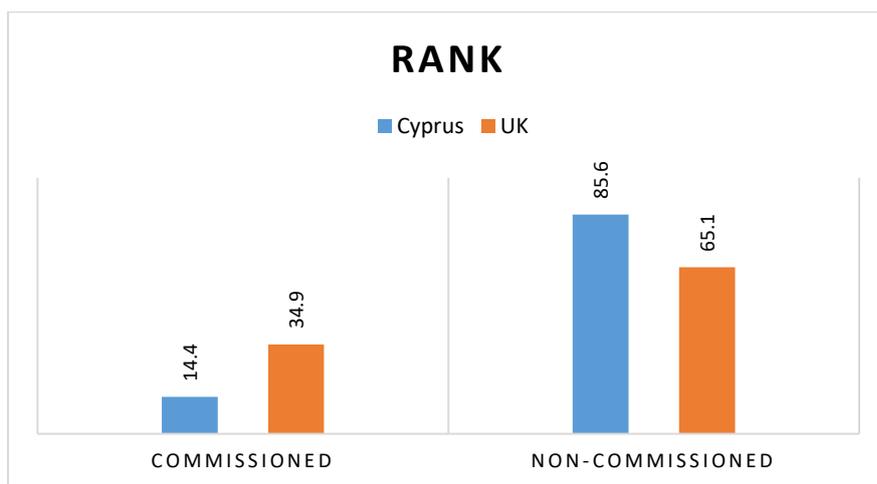
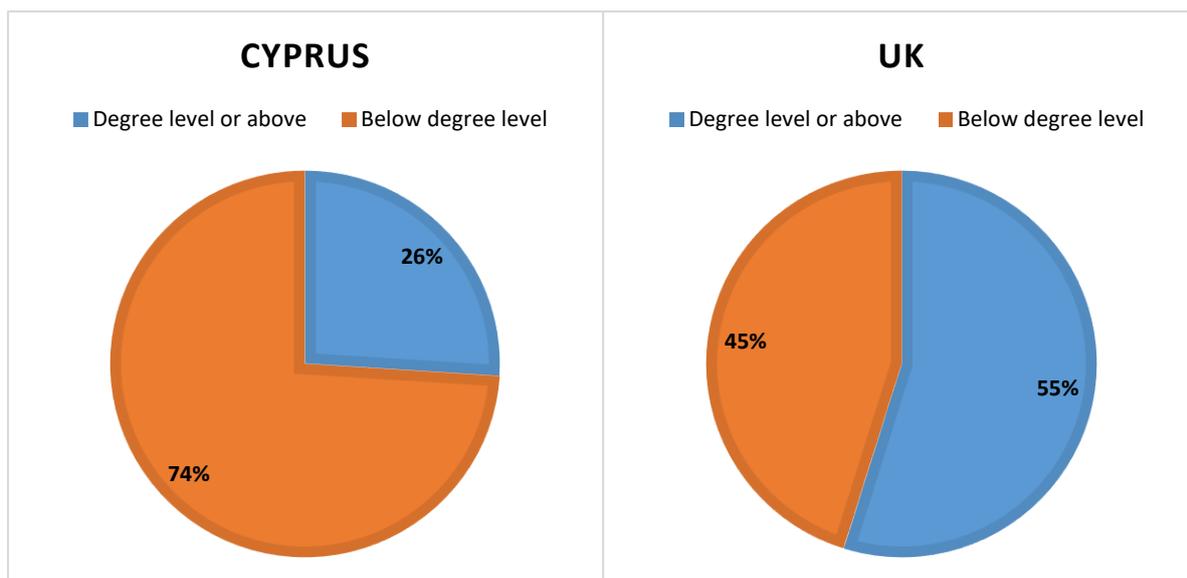


Figure 4: Proportion of spouses with commissioned and non-commissioned serving partners.

As shown below in Figure 5, a higher proportion of spouses in the UK were educated to degree level or above compared to those in Cyprus (39% vs. 26%). Due to the increased representation of officers' spouses in the UK, highlighted above, we investigated whether this educational difference was related to rank.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/location-of-uk-regular-service-and-civilian-personnel-quarterly-statistics-2017>

Figure 5. Proportion of spouses educated to degree level of above/below in Cyprus and the UK.

As shown in Figure 6, when education is split by rank this difference is no longer seen. The proportion of spouses educated to degree level or above is similar in Cyprus and the UK when spouses are stratified by rank (i.e., commissioned vs. non-commissioned) as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.6**. This suggests that it is rank rather than location that can account for differences in education level across spouses, and that officers' spouses were more likely to be educated to degree level or above.

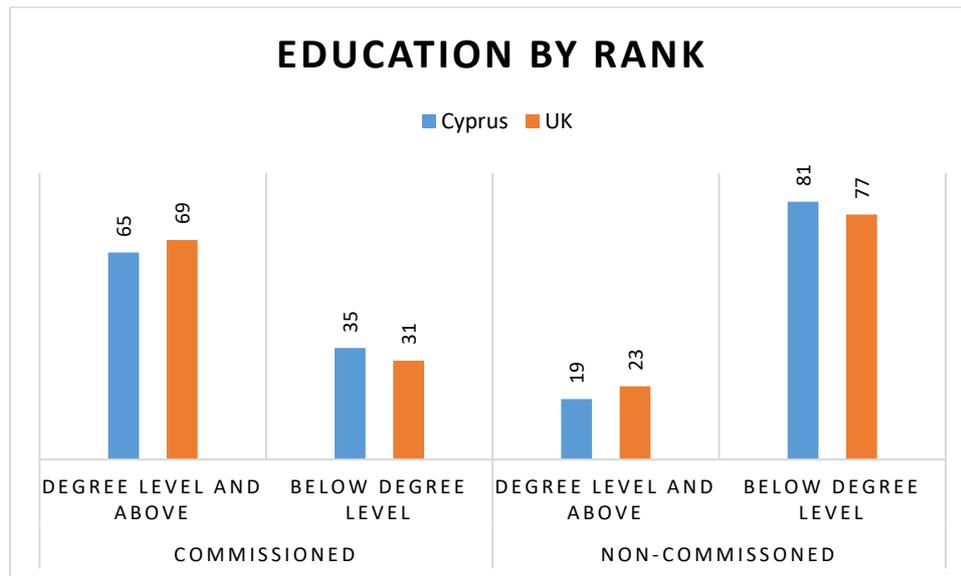


Figure 6. Proportion of spouses education to degree level and above/below, stratified by rank.

### Economic group

At the point of application, spouses were asked to assign themselves against three economic statuses, predetermined by the MOD. The three categories were defined as:

1. Unemployed seeking work (USW): Unemployed spouses (who will be looking for employment).
2. Employed seeking betterment (ESB): Spouses who are currently employed (or self-employed) in some capacity (whether part- or full-time) and who wish to better themselves (for employability purposes).
3. Economically Inactive (EI): Spouses who wish to better themselves for employability purposes but who are/will be unable to actively seek employment for the foreseeable future owing to their personal circumstances.

Figure 7 shows the proportion of spouses in each economic group (i.e., unemployed seeking work; employed seeking betterment; economically inactive) across Cyprus and the UK. A higher proportion of spouses reported that they were currently unemployed in Cyprus (52%) compared to the UK (24%). Furthermore, a higher percentage of spouses in the UK were economically inactive (31%) compared to the spouses in Cyprus (7%). This difference was still evident when split by rank. This suggests there is a higher level of unemployment in military spouses in Cyprus compared to the UK, which

reflects the challenges/barriers to employment in Cyprus cited by spouses on the Trial. In light of this, the higher level of UK spouses identifying as economically inactive is surprising. The terminology for economic groups was not defined on the application forms so we cannot be sure that these were fully understood by spouses. However, the Trial staff, who would have knowledge of these definitions, assisted in completing the application forms.

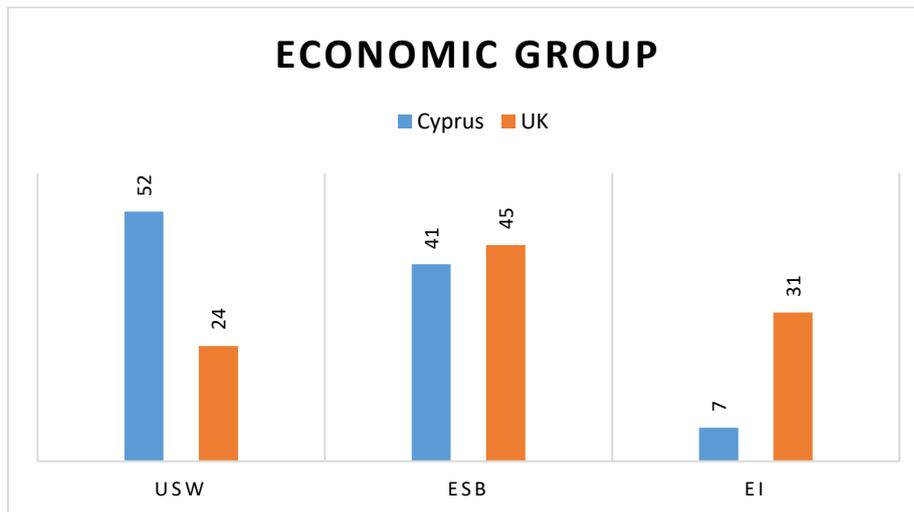


Figure 7. Proportion of spouses in each economic group across Cyprus and the UK.

## Evaluation findings

This section introduces core findings from both the online survey and interviews. The section begins with an overview of engagement with the Trial and take up of the training grant. Following this, the questionnaire findings provide an indication of the Trial's impact across the range of participants. The qualitative findings are then introduced in order to present detailed feedback on the Trial from spouses and their partners.

The findings address the core research questions set out in the introduction in relation to a) employment support needs of military spouses and b) the capacity of the SES Trial to meet these needs; that is, the impact of the Trial. As indicated above, we also comment on Service Families' considerations around employment and transition with the caveat that such considerations are not necessarily linked to participation in the Trial.

### Engagement with the Trial

Of the 435 spouses who signed up to take part in the Trial, 379 (87.1%) engaged with CTP support following registration. Of those 56 spouses who did not engage, 37 did not engage with CTP at all following registration, 15 declined CTP support, and 4 stopped responding to contact from CTP. There were no obvious differences in demographics of those spouses who did and did not engage with the Trial (See Appendix 1 for demographic profile of those who did and did not engage with the Trial). There was a slight increase in the proportion of commissioned ranks in the spouses who did not engage with the Trial compared to the spouses who did (31% vs. 22%). As discussed above, those with serving partners in commissioned ranks were more likely to be educated to degree level or above. This may in part explain the lower level of engagement in those with commissioned partners, who are more likely to hold higher degrees and require less support.

Regarding location, Dhekelia in Cyprus and Scotland in the UK appear to be slightly overrepresented in the group who did not engage compared to the group who did<sup>5</sup>. The highest proportion of spouses who did not engage with the Trial following registration were found in Scotland in the UK (43%, 3 out of 7 spouses from this location), and Dhekelia in Cyprus (18%, 6 out of 33 spouses from this location). This appears to represent lower engagement in remote areas in both Trial arms. In agreement with qualitative data, this suggests that more employment support workshops should be provided in more remote areas to enable all spouses to benefit from this support. There were no observable differences in those who did and did not engage with the Trial when stratified by Trial arm (Cyprus vs. UK).

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<sup>5</sup> Spouses located in Scotland made up only 2% of those who did engage in the UK and 12% of those who did not engage. Spouses located in Dhekelia made up 12% of those who did engage in Cyprus and 19% of those who did engage.

## Training grant

Whilst the majority of spouses in both locations indicated that they were interested in using the training grant when registering on the Trial (404 spouses, 93%), just over a half of spouses (246, 56.6%) used the training grant. The data collected in relation to the use of the training grant was inconsistent across the Trial arms. In depth data regarding the number of courses, cost to the MOD and personal contribution paid per spouse, as well as detailed information about the training/courses the grant was used for was provided from the UK Trial arm and is presented below. However, only data regarding overall amounts paid by the MOD per spouse and general area of training was provided for the Cyprus Trial arm. Furthermore, the area of training was missing for 57 (38.8%) of the Cyprus spouses. In light of this, we were unable to make any meaningful comparison of training grant use between the two Trial arms.

In the UK, 98 out of 195 spouses on the Trial (50.3%) used the training grant. These spouses were demographically similar to the whole UK cohort of spouses. They had a mean age of 35 years, and showed a similar pattern of rank (59.8% non-commissioned, 40.2% commissioned) and education (58.3% below degree level, 41.7% degree level or above).

In Cyprus, 148 out of 240 spouses on the Trial (61.7%) used the training grant. Again these spouse were demographically similar to the whole Cyprus cohort of spouses. They had a mean age of 35 years, showed a similar pattern of rank (87.8% non-commissioned, 12.2% commissioned) and education (73.6% below degree level, 26.4% above degree level).

Figure 8 shows the proportion of spouses in each economic group who used the training grant. This shows that the most frequent economic category in the UK was Employed Seeking Betterment (49%), suggesting the majority of spouses were undertaking courses in order to obtain better or more suitable jobs, or to progress within their current role. The most frequent economic category in Cyprus was Unemployed Seeking Work (54.7%). Again, Figure 7 shows a similar economic status for the whole cohort.

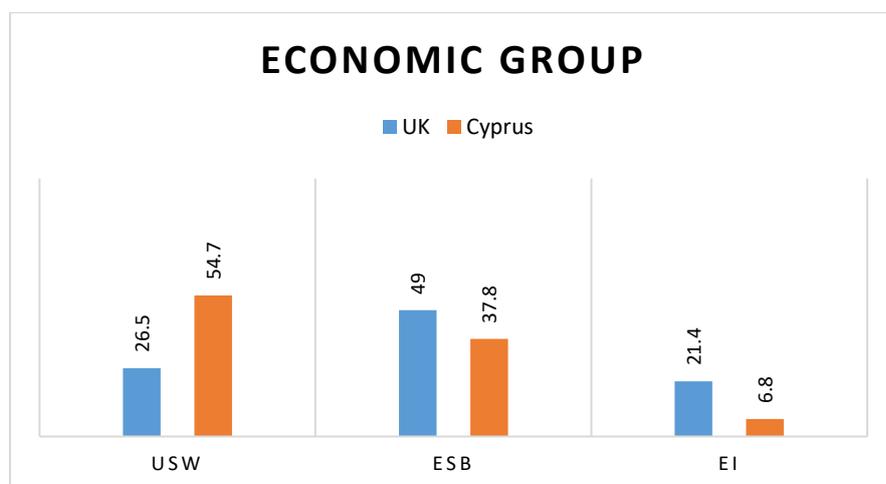


Figure 8. Proportion of spouses who used the training grant in each economic group across Cyprus and the UK.

Table 2 shows the type and frequency of training courses undertaken (note that data from UK spouses included those who completed more than one training course and all courses are included in the count). As discussed above, this data was missing for 57 of the Cyprus spouses (38.5%), and details were only given for the area of training rather than specific courses. As such the table is presented in rank order based on the data from the UK, with the available Cyprus data presented for comparison.

The most popular type of courses undertaken by spouses in the UK were Education and Childcare based courses (16.9%), followed by Beauty Therapy and Hair courses (16.3%), and Hobbies, Arts and Crafts (11.4%). Similarly, the most popular type of course undertaken by spouses in Cyprus were Education and Childcare based courses (14%). However this was then followed by Health and Social care courses (11.8%; including nursing and midwifery), and Beauty Therapy and Hair courses (10.8%). It is of note that some spouses used the training grant as a contribution towards existing tuition fees, including contributions to 2 undergraduate degrees, a masters and a PhD.

Type of training course	Total number of courses undertaken	
	UK	Cyprus
Education and childcare	28 (16.9%)	13 (14%)
Beauty therapy and hair	27 (16.3%)	10 (10.8%)
Hobbies, arts and crafts	19 (11.4%)	6 (6.5%)
Business, management and marketing	13 (7.8%)	7 (4.2%)
Counselling and psychology	12 (7.2%)	6 (6.5%)
Banking and accounting	10 (6%)	2 (2.2%)
Human resources, occupational health and safety	9 (5.4%)	3 (3.2%)
Fitness Instruction	6 (3.6%)	7 (4.2%)
Health and social care	5 (3%)	11 (11.8%)
Law and insurance	5 (3%)	3 (3.2%)
IT and computing	5 (3%)	5 (5.4%)
Medical science	5 (3%)	2 (2.2%)
Coaching and mentoring	4 (2.4%)	3 (3.2%)
Language and translation	4 (2.4%)	1 (1.1%)
English and literacy	4 (2.4%)	1 (1.1%)

Driving lessons	2 (1.2%)	2 (2.2%)
Core GCSEs (Maths, English)	2 (1.2%)	1 (1.6%)
Diet and nutrition	2 (1.2%)	2 (2.2%)
Other	5 (3%)	8 (8.7%)

Table 2. Number of courses undertaken by category and stratified by Trial Arm.

Table 3 shows for the UK cohort the average number of courses per spouse (mean, mode and range), the average total cost of courses undertaken per spouse, the average amount paid by the MOD per spouse, and the average personal contribution made by spouses. The only information available for the Cyprus cohort was the average amount paid by the MOD per spouse.

	UK (n=98)	Cyprus (n=148)
Average number of courses per spouse		Not available
<i>Mean</i>	1.7	
<i>Mode</i>	1	
<i>Range</i>	1-8	
Average total course cost per spouse (range)	£1008.74 (£249-£5600)	Not available
Average cost for the MOD per spouse (range)	£726.36 (£249-£879)	£755.14 (£124.05-£879)
Average personal contribution (range)	£282.59 (£0-£4721)	Not available

Table 3. Average number and cost of courses stratified by Trial Arm.

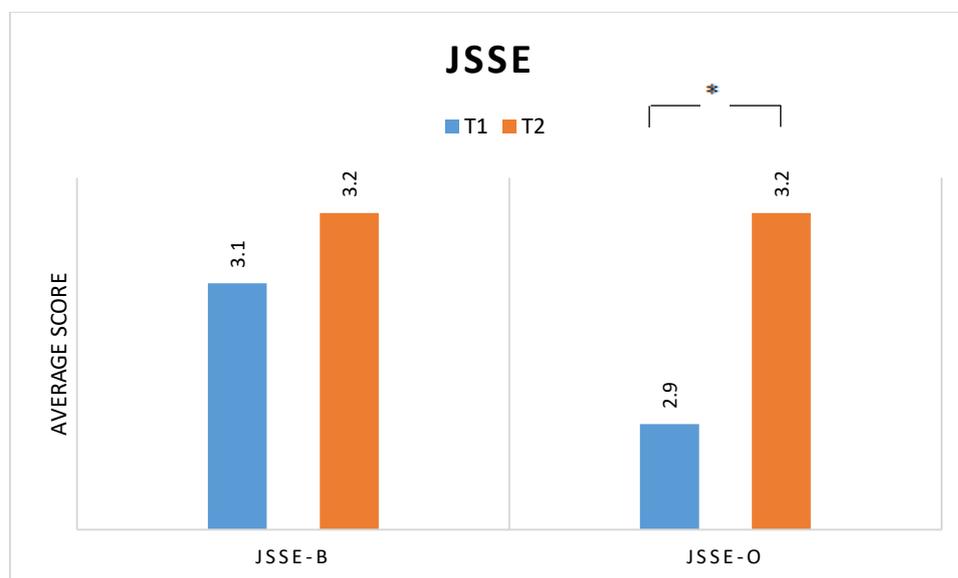
## Questionnaire findings

Overall, the questionnaire results demonstrate a positive impact of the Trial on spouses' lives. Whilst no change was seen in spouse's mental well-being scores, a small but statistically significant increase was seen in spouses' belief they could achieve positive employment outcomes. Spouses were generally satisfied with the support they received on the Trial, and were particularly happy with the access they were given to the training grant. Despite this, the Trial did not have any observable impact on the serving spouses' future service plans.

Sixty-six UK-based and 45 Cyprus-based spouses completed the T1 questionnaires, a response rate of 34.2%. This is comparable to the typical response rates found in online survey research (Nulty, 2008; Schonlau et al., 2002). Additionally, 24 UK-based and 21 Cyprus-based spouses completed the T2 questionnaire, a response rate of 13.8%. Thirty-four spouses completed both the T1 and T2 questionnaires, allowing for comparative analysis.

### Job search self-efficacy

The Job Search Self-Efficacy (JSSE; Saks et al., 2015) questionnaire measures an individual's belief that they can successfully perform specific job search behaviours and obtain employment. It consists of two scales which differentiate between job search behaviours (JSSE-B) and job search outcomes (JSSE-O). Figure 9 shows the average JSSE scores at T1 and T2 for those spouses (UK and Cyprus combined) who completed **both the T1 and T2 questionnaires** (n=34). Low response rate at T2 meant that a comparison between locations was not possible. A paired samples t-tests found no significant difference in the JSSE-B ( $t[33]=-1.416$ ,  $p=0.166$ ) between the two time points. However, there was a significant difference in the JSSE-O ( $t[33]=-2.174$ ,  $p=0.037$ ). This suggests that the spouses belief that they could achieve positive job search outcomes (i.e., obtain employment) increased over the two time points. The scores are clustered around 3, which represents the mid-point of a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is not at all confident, and 5 is totally confident).



\*significant to the  $p<.05$  level.

Figure 9: Average scores on the JSSE-B and JSSE-O at T1 and T2 for all spouses

### Wellbeing

Figure 10 shows the average scores for wellbeing in Cyprus and UK spouses as measured by the WEMWBS at T1 and T2. Again, these scores were similar across the location and time points, suggesting the Trial did not impact on mental wellbeing.



Figure 10: Average scores on the WEMWBS for spouses in Cyprus and the UK at T1 and T2.

A paired samples t-test carried out with those spouses (UK and Cyprus combined) who completed the questionnaires at both T1 and T2 (n=34) found no significant difference in the WEMWBS scores across time points ( $t[33]=-1.284, p=0.208$ ).

The scores at both time points are slightly below the population norm of 51.6 identified in the Health Survey for England Data (2011). It is not possible to determine whether these differences are statistically significant from the general population as we do not have a control group comparison. However the lower scores are in line with the findings of Trewick and Miller (2014) who showed lower quality of life and wellbeing scores in unemployed military spouses compared to a civilian cohort.

### Value-added questions

Forty-five spouses completed the value-added questions at T2 (24 UK and 21 Cyprus-based spouses). The results from the UK and Cyprus are presented together in this section. The following covers the feedback given by these spouses on what support they accessed during the Trial, their satisfaction with the support they received, and the impact the Trial has had on their lives.

### Engagement with the Trial

The majority of spouses heard about the Trial through the HIVE or education centre (40%), followed by word of mouth (35.6%), online (8.9%) and by poster (4.4%). Figure 11 shows the number of spouses who accessed the different types of support available on the Trial. This suggests that the most popular elements of the Trial were training grant and one-to-one support.

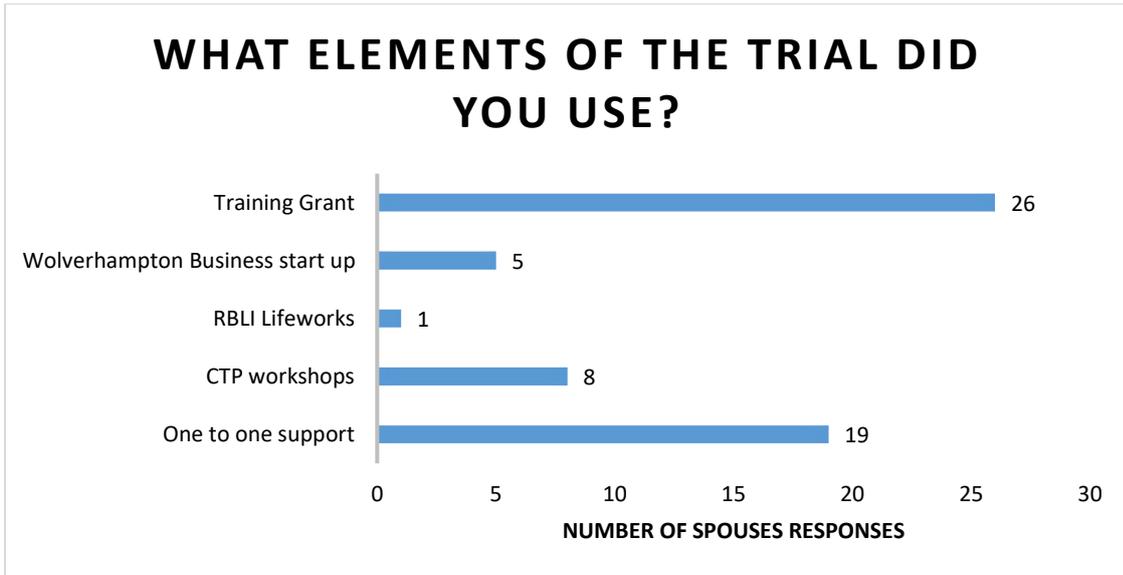


Figure 11: The number of spouses who accessed the different aspects of the Trial.

The majority of spouses who responded to the questionnaire reported that they did not attend any CTP workshops (71.1%). Childcare was the most cited problem in attending workshops (37.8%), followed by timings of the workshops (26.7%), and difficulty with traveling to workshops (11.1%). Other cited reasons were personal reasons, lack of availability of workshops in location, and uncertainty of serving partner’s schedule.

**Satisfaction with Trial**

Satisfaction with the Trial was generally good, with 80% of spouses agreeing they would recommend the Trial to other spouses (See Figure 12). In terms of what they had got out of the Trial, 62% agreed that the Trial had met their expectations and 70.3% felt they had met their personal learning objectives or goals whilst on the Trial.

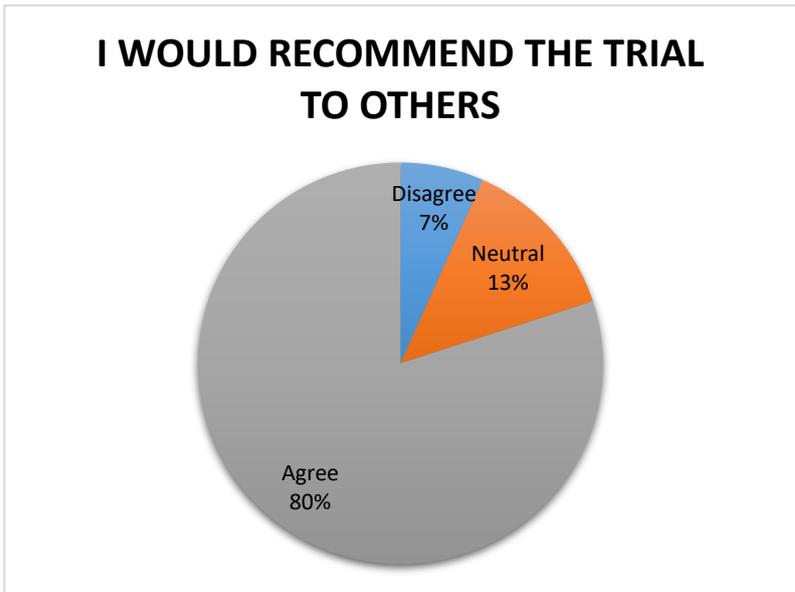


Figure 12. Proportion of spouses who would recommend the Trial to others.

Figure 13 shows the proportion of spouses who reported that they were satisfied with the different aspects of support available on the Trial (excluding those who indicated they did not access these). Spouses were most satisfied with the training grant amount (81%), and the majority of spouses reported that they were satisfied with the opportunities that the Trial had provided them with (64%). The highest rates of dissatisfaction were seen for the way the Trial had been run and organised (15%), which is in line with our qualitative findings.

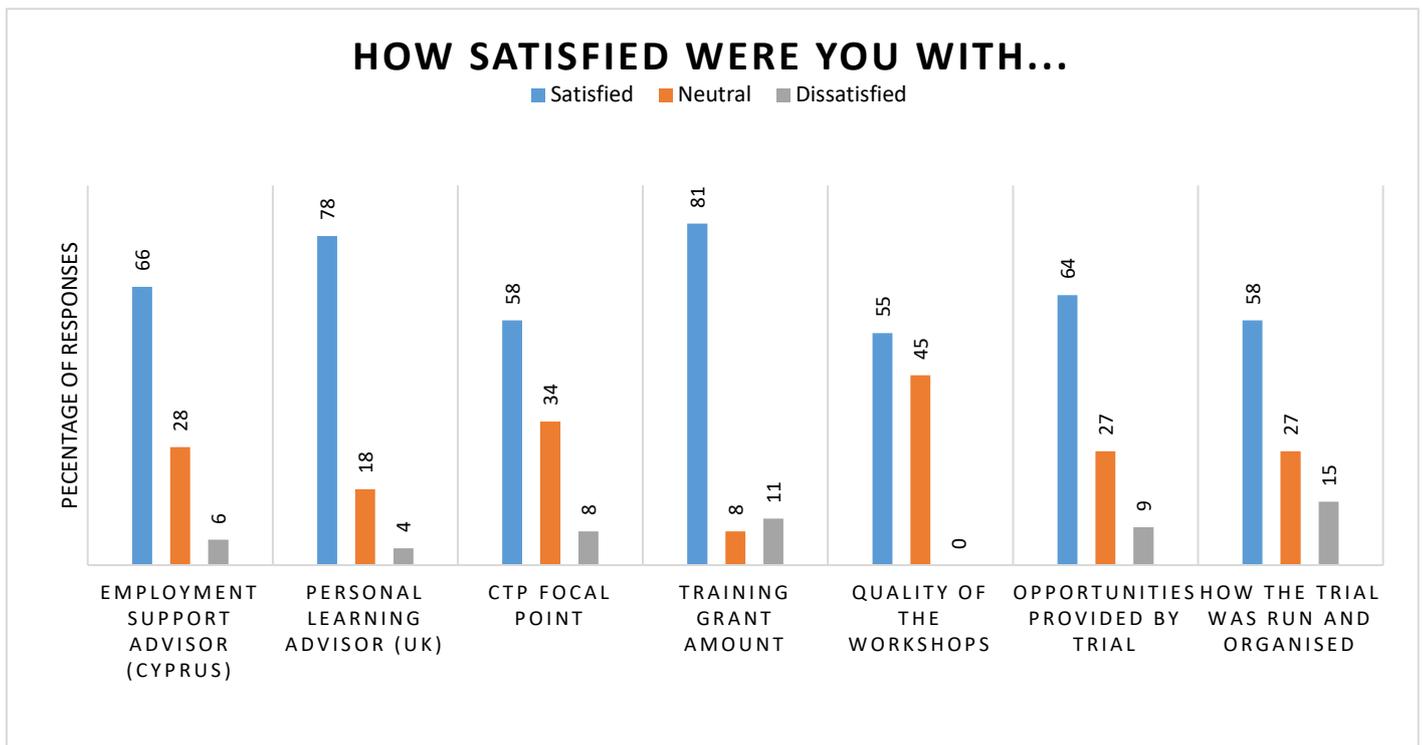


Figure 13: Spouses' satisfaction with different aspects of support available on the Trial.

### Impact of the Trial

The survey data suggest that the majority of spouses agreed the Trial had a positive impact on their lives (78%; See Figure 14)<sup>6</sup>. Spouses were asked a number of questions relating to the impact the Trial had on their confidence in the job market (see Figure 15; excluded spouses who indicated the question was not applicable). As illustrated in Figure 15 the majority of spouses felt that taking part in the Trial had increased their confidence in their current job, in seeking employment or better employment and in applying for a promotion or progression within their current role.

<sup>6</sup> The impact of the Trial on spouses' lives is explored more thoroughly in the qualitative findings section below.

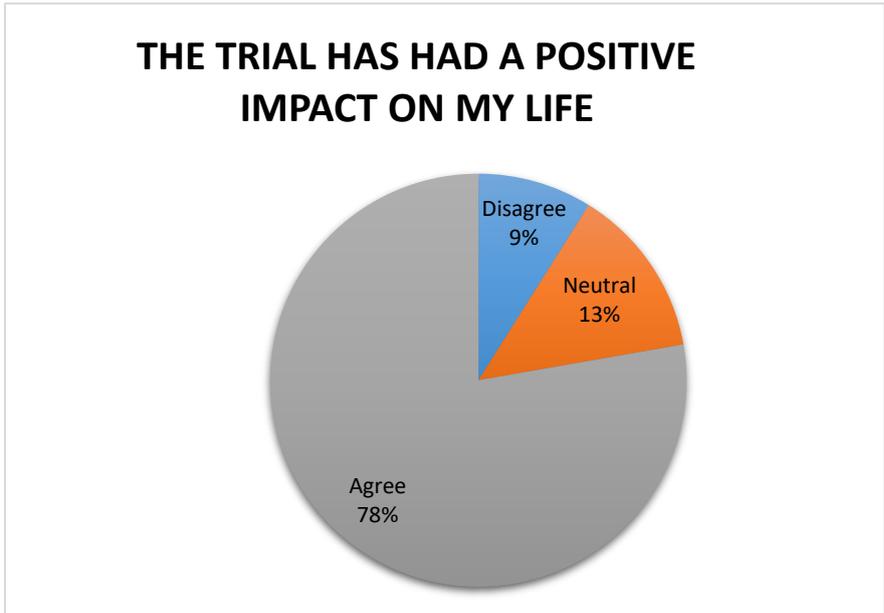


Figure 14: Spouses' agreement with the statement 'The Trial has had a positive impact on my life'.

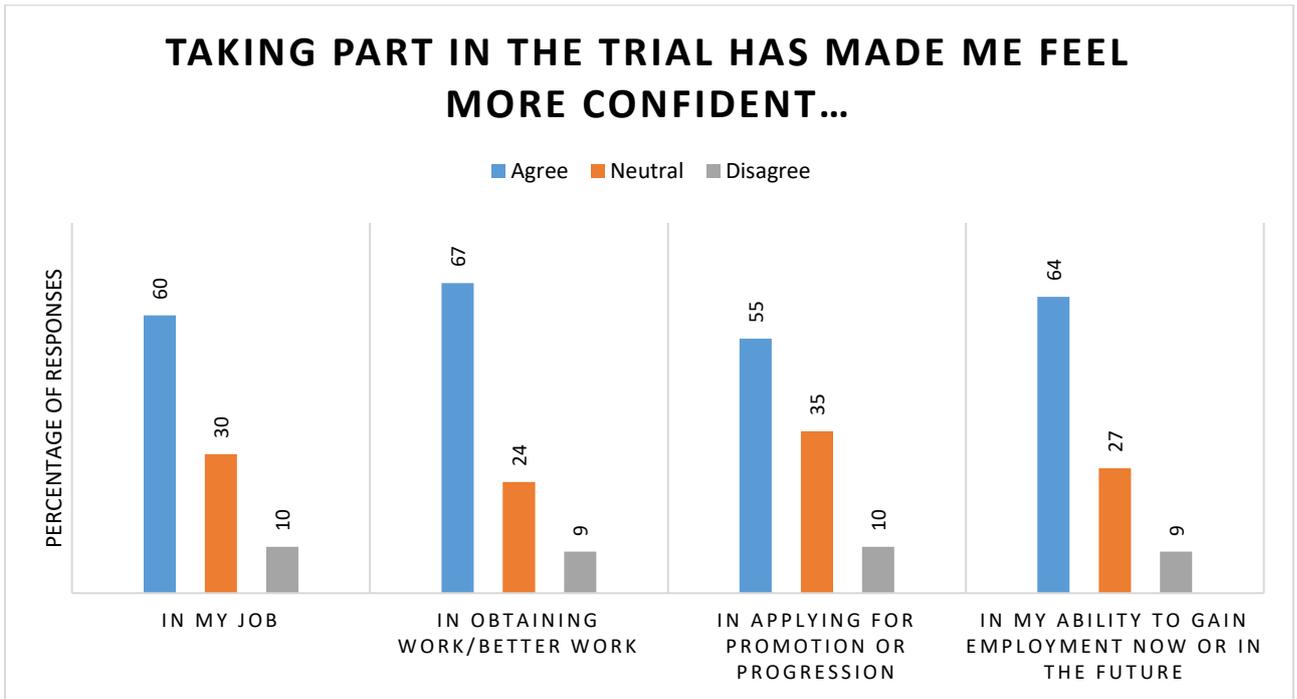


Figure 15: Spouse's responses to how the Trial affected their confidence in the job market.

Spouses were also asked about their partner's future service plans and whether taking part in the Trial had any impact on this. Figure 16 shows their partner's current plans for staying or leaving the Armed Forces. This shows that the majority of Service Personnel intended to stay at least to their end of their current engagement or commission. Most spouses who responded to the survey (58%) did not feel either negative or positive about their serving partner leaving the services.

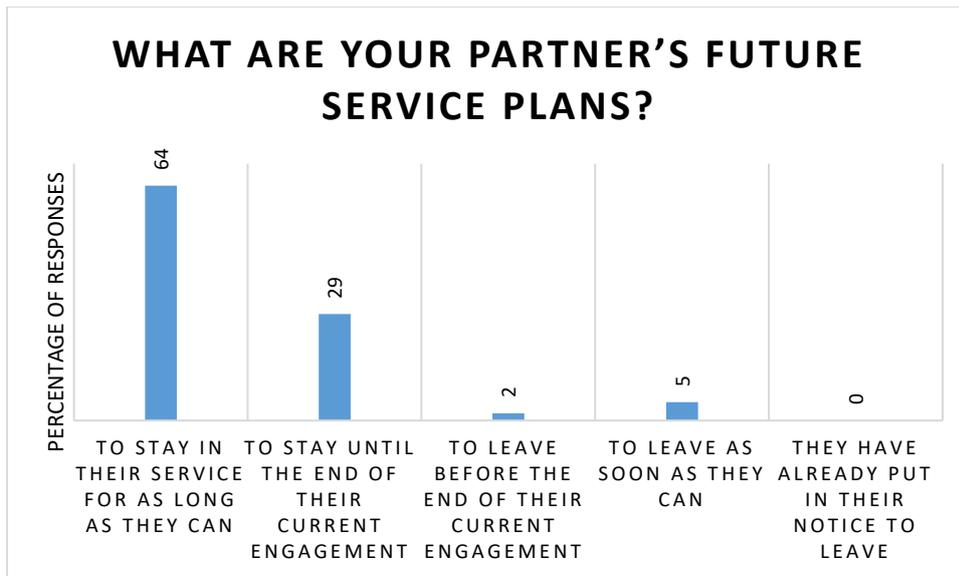


Figure 16: Service partner's current service plans.

Responses to the survey suggest that for the majority of spouses the Trial did not impact on intentions to remain in Service (see Figure 16), with 77.8% (35 spouses) indicating that the Trial had no impact on their serving partner's future service plans. However, Figure 17 also indicates that 7 spouses (15.6%) felt that their taking part in the Trial had increased their serving partner's intentions to stay, and 3 spouses (6.7%) felt it had increased their serving partner's intention to leave. We are unable to determine from this data the mechanisms through which the support provided on the Trial impacted on service plans. Further detailed investigation will be required to determine whether providing spouse employment support is incentive enough to impact on intentions to remain in Service.

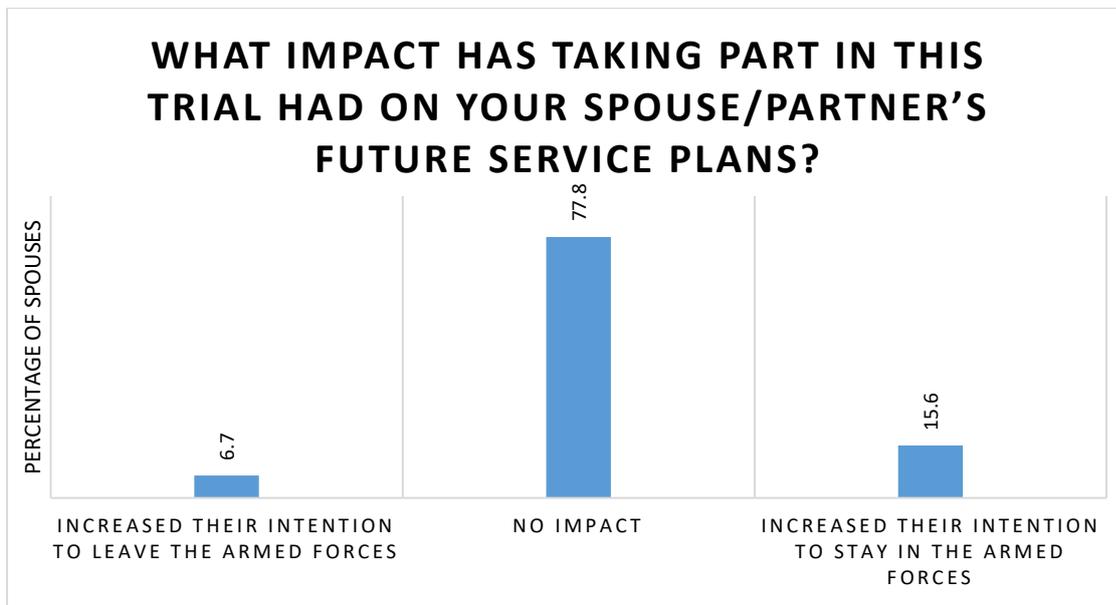


Figure 17. Impact of the Trial on serving partner's future service plans.

### Additional feedback

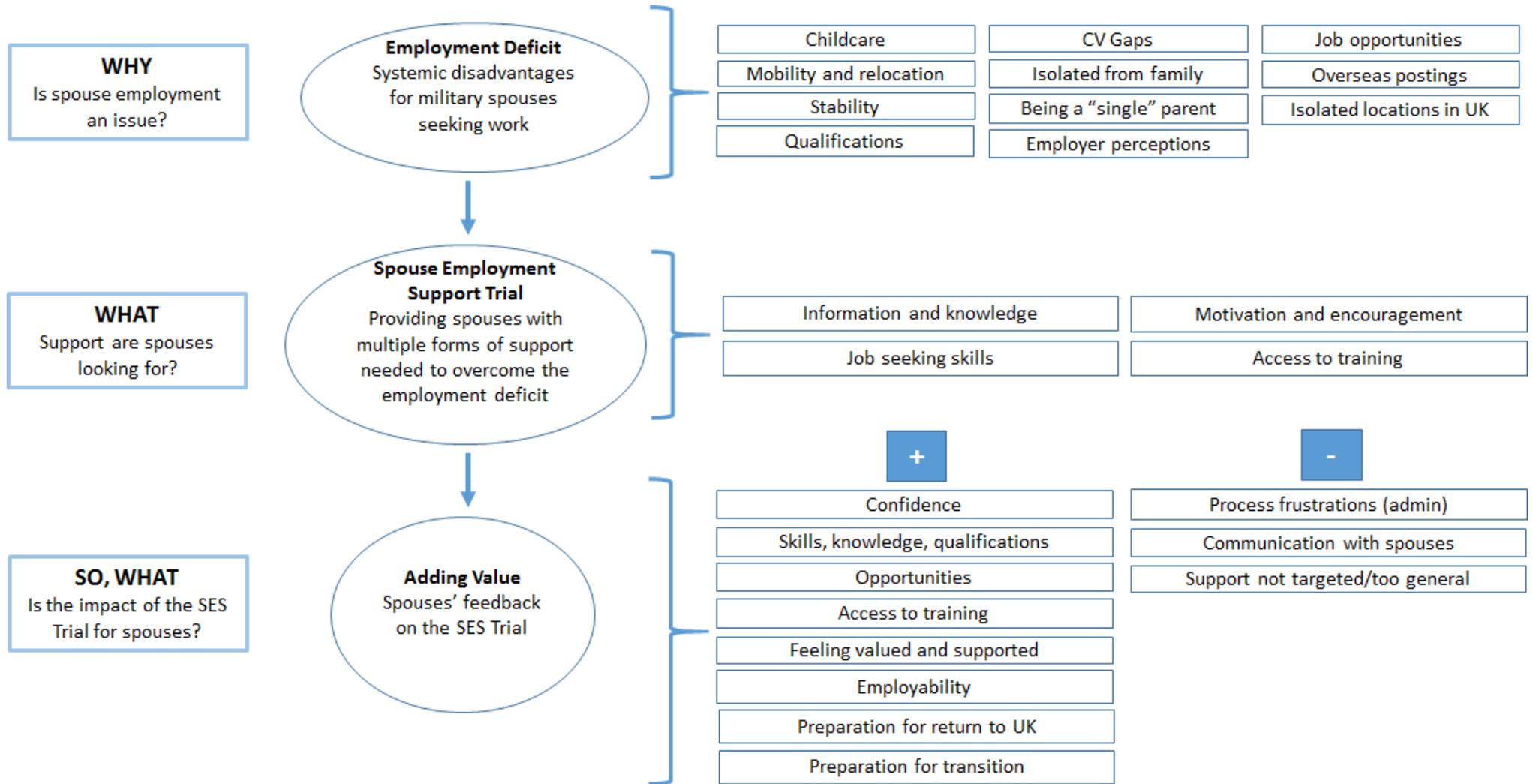
Spouses were asked if they had any additional feedback at the end of the online survey. A number of spouses from both the UK and Cyprus arms of the Trial were very positive about the Trial and were grateful for the opportunities it had provided for them. They described how the Trial had enabled them to build on their skills and increase their confidence in gaining employment. In particular, spouses appreciated the funding provided by the training grant which enabled them to access training they otherwise wouldn't have. Spouses also found the CV writing workshops and one-to-one advice from an employment advisor very helpful.

Despite this positive feedback, a number of UK spouses also described poor organisation and communication regarding the UK arm of the Trial. Problems with the administration of the training grant were the most cited problem, with some missing out on this opportunity due to poor communication and complex documentation. Furthermore, the taxation of the grant was described by one UK spouse as 'completely unfair'.

## Qualitative findings

The demographic profile of the interview participants can be found in the Appendix. Briefly, spouses and service personnel from both the Army and RAF were represented (the Army was represented in Cyprus only), with a mix of both commissioned and non-commissioned serving partners from a number of different locations across Cyprus and the UK. The following thematic map (Figure 18) presents a general overview of the interview findings, depicting the major themes (central flow-diagram) and sub-themes (boxes to the right hand side) identified during the analysis. The thematic map is followed by an overview of the feedback from Trial participants and a description of the major themes and sub-themes.

**Figure 18: Thematic map of findings from the evaluation of the Spouse Employment Support (SES) Trial**

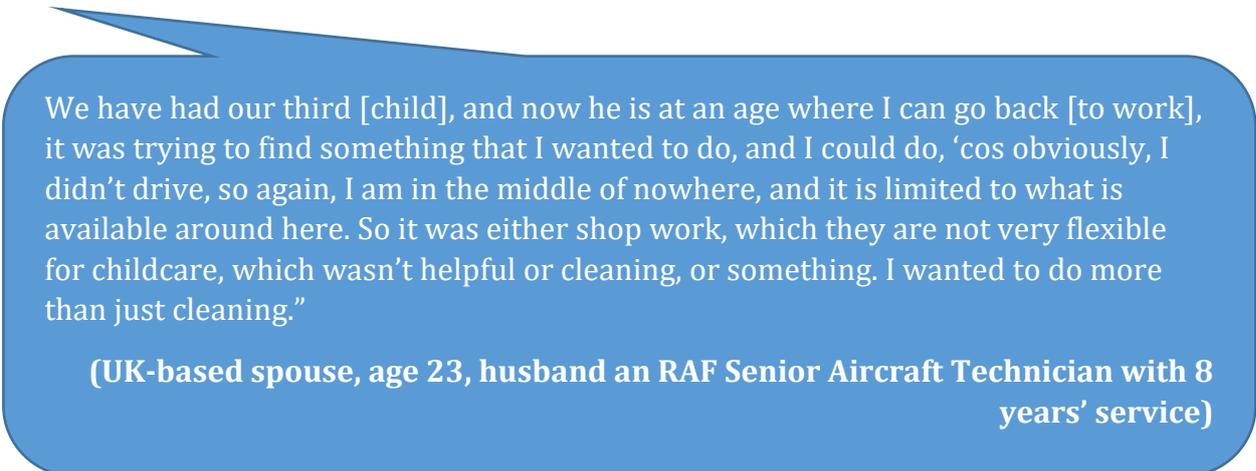


## RQ1: Employment support needs among military spouses

Our first research question asked what the employment support needs of military spouses are. As indicated by the first major theme in the above thematic map, the primary need was to overcome an 'employment deficit'. This deficit occurred because of numerous 'barriers' to employment which, when considered as a whole, appear to amount to an element of systematic disadvantage for Service spouses in terms of seeking and securing employment. The employment deficit did *not* relate specifically to the proportion of Service spouses in employment compared to non-Service UK spouses (see, e.g., Gribble (2017) for further data), but particularly to the difficulties in securing employment that was commensurate with spouses' skills, interests, abilities, and accessible locations.

Particularly frequent were spouses' comments regarding issues of mobility, stability and being isolated from family support, lack of opportunities in remote and overseas locations, low confidence resulting from being out of the job market for long periods, and the need for affordable childcare. Such issues have all been identified previously in the research literature as barriers to employment for military spouses (Trewick and Muller, 2014; Hisnanick & Little, 2014; Meadows et al., 2015). Our findings confirm that such barriers exist amongst this group of military spouses, and further highlight the difficulties for those based in Cyprus where job opportunities are limited in number and narrow in terms the types of work available.

In the UK, spouses are also affected by similar barriers to employment and career opportunities. The remote geographical location of some of the bases also contributed to social and labour opportunity isolation among UK spouses.



We have had our third [child], and now he is at an age where I can go back [to work], it was trying to find something that I wanted to do, and I could do, 'cos obviously, I didn't drive, so again, I am in the middle of nowhere, and it is limited to what is available around here. So it was either shop work, which they are not very flexible for childcare, which wasn't helpful or cleaning, or something. I wanted to do more than just cleaning."

**(UK-based spouse, age 23, husband an RAF Senior Aircraft Technician with 8 years' service)**

## Prominent barriers and support needs

A number of barriers and support needs consistently emerged from the findings as prominent difficulties or needs in relation to employment:

## Childcare

Consistent with prior research evidence (e.g., Gribble, 2017; Rowe et al., 2014; CSJ, 2016) our findings demonstrate that access to affordable childcare is an important limiting factor for spouse employment and training. Difficulties encountered included the inability of Service Personnel to assist with childcare, lack of available formal childcare in remote and overseas locations, and relatedly, being isolated from family support networks who might otherwise have assisted with childcare responsibilities.

On-camp it's just the childcare again because we're all away from our families. Back home you'd just ask your mum to have the kids for an hour. You can't here . . . you do have to pay for childcare here, there's no favours from family members so you do have to pay for it.

**(Cyprus spouse, aged 32, husband an Army Lance Corporal with 16 years' service)**

## CV gaps

Spouses identified a need to negotiate the problem of blank-looking CVs when seeking to engage with potential employers. Blank CVs were considered to be partly a result of being out of work through raising children and partly because of accompanied postings with few opportunities to work. Again, the problem of CV gaps and the need for supporting in addressing this issue has been identified in previous research into spouse employment (e.g., Gribble, 2017).

For wives who are moving back to the UK and have incredibly blank CVs, if not completely blank then it's very frightening looking at a blank piece of paper. It would – if you are the type of person who wants to help yourself you probably wouldn't have a blank CV. But if you fell pregnant really young and you've had a number of children and you've raised them and now you think 'Gosh I need to get back into it', you don't know where to go.

**(Cyprus spouse, aged 35, husband an Army Warrant Officer with 21 years' service)**

## Personal development and well-being

Whilst military spouses often discussed the financial need to pursue employment, many also described of a need to work for reasons of personal development, fulfilment and well-being. Spouses discussed a need to maintain purpose and an identity beyond that of 'military wife', and to develop a sense of personal independence (in contrast to being a 'dependent' of their spouse). They also discussed the desire to 'pursue a career' as

opposed to 'getting a job', and the necessity of working for their own enjoyment and social connections.

The following list provides a summary of the reasons spouses gave for seeking work (numbers in brackets indicate the number of respondents endorsing this reason)

- Financial (19)
- Mental well-being (15)
- 'Being occupied' vs. being bored (11)
- Independence (12)
- Self-improvement/fulfilment (15)
- Social reasons (10)
- Identity and purpose (13)

One commonly recurring phrase – “sitting around” – emphasised the personal need to work and underscored the importance of work for personal well-being. For example, as one Cyprus-based spouse put it, “Not sitting around ... not sitting around waiting for them [partner] to come home and stuff”. The notion of “sitting around” was frequently used to describe experiences of boredom and passivity which spouses viewed as damaging to their well-being and to their experiences of accompanying their partners to, in particular, remote and overseas postings.

Accordingly, it is important to highlight spouses' need for work as not simply economic, but a necessary component of positive mental health. Our findings assert the importance of work for the mental well-being of military spouses. Spouses, in general, both wanted and needed to work and to overcome the employment deficit which they encountered by virtue of the barriers associated with being a military spouse and 'tied migrant' (Little, 2007; Hisnanick and Little, 2014).

I need to do something for me, for my mental health really. There is only so much of being a housewife you can do. It is a thankless task, and I think I need something for me. And I am also aware that I am not going to be needed in the capacity I am needed now forever, so I need to have another plan.

**(UK spouse, aged 40, husband an RAF Sergeant with 18 years' service)**

## RQ2: Capacity of SES Trial to meet support needs (Impact of the Trial)

On the basis of the feedback we received, there is strong indication that the support provided through the Trial was of benefit to spouses and their Serving partners. Key recurring themes were repeatedly identified regarding the opportunities that the SES Trial has provided to spouses and the benefits they are reaping from these opportunities. As illustrated in the thematic map, the majority of spouses' feedback on the support they received through the Trial was positive, with negative comments most often related to 'process' frustrations such as delays in processing of the training grant, in some cases. In this section, we provide further detail on the core benefits experienced by spouses participating in the Trial, followed by spouses' suggestions on how support could be improved.

### Confidence

For many spouses, improved confidence was derived through the workshops they participated in and the career consultancy support they received. Spouses described feeling more confident about their ability to produce a good CV, to present themselves effectively at interviews, and to work towards securing their ideal job. This finding is consistent with our questionnaire results which indicated that the majority of spouses felt more confident in seeking work as a result of the Trial.

It's [Trial] helped me to become more confident, if I'm going into an interview, I know what I'm going to be asking and I know how to approach some things, so to be more confident is a good thing.

**(Cyprus Spouse, aged 30, husband an RAF Corporal with 10 years' service)**

Many spouses were therefore able to address the lack of confidence which they experienced as a result of gaps in their CV and from being absent from the workforce for long periods.

### Access to training

Service spouses believed that the training they had accessed through the Trial would be of concrete benefit to them in pursuing their desired careers. Training was for many spouses an essential component of their career development plans, and participating in the SES Trial gave spouses access to training opportunities which they otherwise may not have been able to afford or would have put off doing. Being provided with a grant to pursue essential training was therefore considered a central benefit of spouses' participation in the SES Trial.

Well the training grant is very helpful, because it is going to pay for half the coaching and mentoring course, it is £1800, and if they pay £875, although it still translates to £500 in my husband's pay packet it still goes to £875 to [training provider], so on the front end, it is sponsoring some of that course.

**(UK spouse, age 47, husband an RAF Wing Commander with 25 years' service)**

This finding corresponds with the questionnaire results which indicated that 81% of spouses were satisfied with the amount of money they received from the training grant.

### Skills, knowledge and qualifications

Spouses developed new skills, knowledge and qualifications as a result of their participation in the SES Trial. These were partly as an outcome of the training courses they undertook through the Trial, and partly as a result of what they had learned in the careers workshops they attended. Spouses and Service Personnel acknowledged these skills, knowledge and qualifications as tangible resources which spouses would be able to use to seek employment and to better themselves.

The course has provided me extra knowledge in order to do what I want to do, but I would never have had this knowledge had it not been for the SES Trial, because I would have just been here [Cyprus] seeing out my three years until I could go to college maybe when I got back to the UK. So it is, it's fabulous.

**(Cyprus spouse, aged 33, husband an RAF Senior Aircraftsman with 7 years' service)**

The Trial also provided spouses with opportunities to pursue new careers; to change direction and follow long-held interests and ambitions. Spouses spoke of wanting to make the most of the opportunities they had been provided through the Trial, and to use the SES Trial as a springboard to personal and career development.

I've always wanted to teach but its jumping off that ladder and getting back into the training. Having the confidence to do it, and things like that to do it. And it [Trial] made me jump, and I'm loving it.

**(Cyprus spouse, aged 48, husband an RAF Sergeant with 22 years' service)**

### Feeling valued and supported

Spouses described feeling recognised and appreciated for the sacrifices which they – as Service spouses – had made in terms of their family lives and own careers in order to support their partner’s military career. These spouses viewed the Trial as a way for the military to show this recognition and to demonstrate that spouses are being valued and invested in.

I think there are so many spouses who, any sort of recognition, of the fact that it’s difficult to find work makes people feel better. It’s like, it takes away some of the frustration. It’s the feeling somewhat appreciated, and actually an acknowledgement of the fact that you do sacrifice stuff. I think any recognition is good and positive. Especially because I don’t think people realise the fact that you sacrifice your family, your career, your personal life essentially. Because you’re forced to move around constantly.

**(Cyprus spouse, aged 32, husband an RAF Corporal with 9 years’ service)**

In the focus group with the Trial management team, the finding that spouses felt valued and supported as a result of the Trial was described as an unexpected positive outcome. Whilst not anticipated on commencement of the Trial, spouses feeling supported and appreciated was therefore acknowledged as an important by-product of the provision of employment support.

### Employability

Spouses also saw the Trial as a catalyst that encouraged them to evaluate their employment status and job aspirations and to actively engage and plan to find paid employment. They saw the Trial as a way to retrain for jobs that they had held prior to becoming a military spouse, or else obtain new skills that would enhance their employability.

Another benefit was that as a result of being on the Trial, spouses began to be more proactive in seeking to re-activate their careers, and seeking other training that would benefit their employability, independently of the Trial. Some became aware of the support already available to them via the base teaching and learning centres, which was outside the scope of the Trial, but which was also able to provide skills and training that would improve their chances of securing paid employment.

### Preparation for return to the UK (Cyprus-based spouses)

With regard to the Cyprus-based spouses, the training opportunities they sought out were mostly geared towards up-skilling themselves in preparation for seeking employment on return to the UK. This is because of the lack of employment opportunities for spouses based overseas, which was routinely and consistently discussed by the Cyprus cohort.

I think I chose these qualifications that I'm doing because they are linked to jobs that I'm interested in for when we go back to the UK. So I'm hoping it will help.

(Cyprus spouse, aged 26, husband an RAF Corporal with 15 years' service)

### RQ3: Impact of the Trial on Service families' preparation for transition

Spouses and Service Personnel whom we interviewed were extremely varied in the consideration and planning they had given towards their eventual transition from the military to civilian life. Some had well-formed plans for leaving the military in terms of future housing and desired location, and concurrently viewed building up employable skills and a career as important steps toward realising their plans. On the other hand, some spouses and couples had not made any provisions or preparations from transition outside of the awareness that at some (psychologically distant) point they would leave the military.

#### Retention or Transition?

With the data available, we are unable to comment on whether participation in the Trial influenced Service families' intentions to remain longer in Service, or to transition out. For instance, one issue we aimed to address was whether employment support for spouses contributed to Service families' overall satisfaction with military life in a manner which incentivised them to continue with their military careers for longer (i.e., whether spouse employment support is "retention positive" in military parlance). We also considered the possibility that, having received employment support and enhanced their future prospects, Service families may feel more empowered to pursue successful civilian lives and careers and thus decide to leave.

The majority of spouses and Service Personnel we consulted, however, had not considered the influence of spouse employment support on their collective career decision-making process. For many, there were other factors (e.g., mobility, lifestyle, proximity to family) which seemed to exert a much greater influence over their intentions to stay or to go. The ambiguity of responses in relation to the retention question reflects the questionnaire finding that 78% of respondents felt that participation in the SES Trial had 'no impact' on their career decisions.

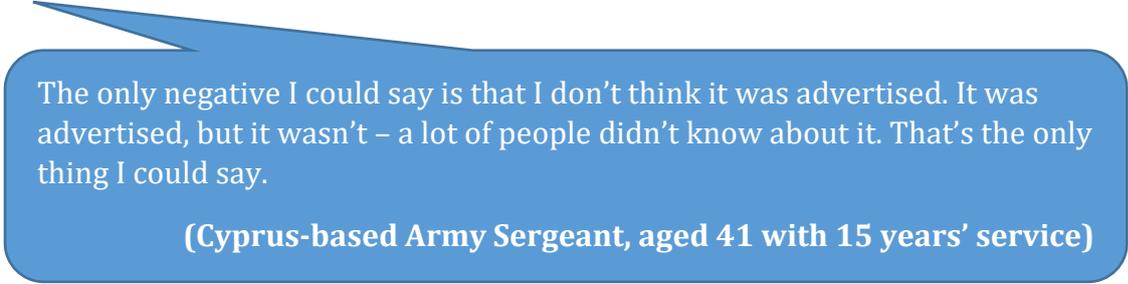
In order to properly address the Trial's impact on retention, further longitudinal research would be required to ascertain what proportion of Service Personnel whose spouses' received support are still serving in, say, 3, 4, or 5 years' time, along with the reasons they attribute to their career decisions.

## Negative feedback

As indicated above, negative feedback from participating spouses was related to organisational and process factors. Whilst the majority of feedback on the Trial was positive, elements of the Trial which received negative feedback were as follows:

### Advertising

Some spouses complained that they had only found out about the Trial through word of mouth, and that few efforts appeared to have been made to promote the Trial in various locations at which it was provided.



The only negative I could say is that I don't think it was advertised. It was advertised, but it wasn't – a lot of people didn't know about it. That's the only thing I could say.

**(Cyprus-based Army Sergeant, aged 41 with 15 years' service)**

### Communication

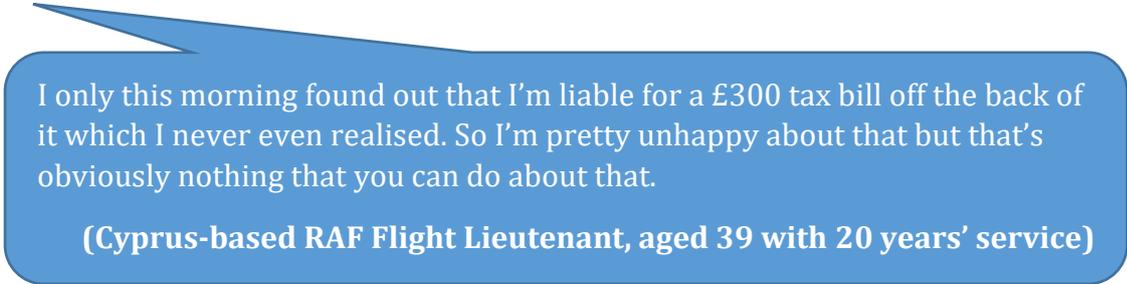
There were several reported instances of communications breakdowns between spouses and the Trial providers, or between spouses and the Trial administrators. Some spouses reported lengthy delays in receiving support, or being contacted by the provider following their initial application. In terms of the engagement from the Trial provider, there was a mixed response; some spouses had good relationships with their career advisors and found them contactable, engaging and helpful. Others felt that they had difficulties contacting them, and that a lot of the information they were being provided with was easily available online. Additionally, the Trial providers reported difficulties in contacting some of the spouses.

### Paper Trail & Documentation

There were some comments from spouses regarding the complexity of the applications they were required to complete and that the forms had apparently been designed with military personnel in mind (e.g., with regard to terminology and questions asked). In the UK-based Trial in particular, spouses and Trial administrators alike complained that the paper trail associated with spouses' participation (e.g., application forms and training grant applications which required signing and countersigning) was laborious and difficult to keep track of. It was suggested that such processes could have been streamlined if they were digitised, thereby making the Trial less resource-intensive to administer, especially when run across many different bases as it was in the UK.

### Training grant as a taxable benefit

The training grant which spouses received as part of the Trial was considered by HMRC as a taxable benefit-in-kind. Practically speaking, this meant that a tax contribution was deducted from the Service person's paycheque. Spouses and Service Personnel generally considered the tax-deductible status of the training grant as a drawback of the Trial, effectively reducing the amount of money they received for undertaking training. Service Personnel often reported not knowing when the deduction would be taken from their pay, or how much would be deducted. Our findings suggest that many of the spouses and their serving partners were unaware of the training grant's taxable status, despite this being set out in the application agreement they signed. Respondents therefore suggested that this aspect of the Trial could have been more clearly communicated to them (e.g., verbally, not just on the application form) as part of the application process. However, it is acknowledged that a document explaining the tax liability was included in the application pack given to spouses.



I only this morning found out that I'm liable for a £300 tax bill off the back of it which I never even realised. So I'm pretty unhappy about that but that's obviously nothing that you can do about that.

**(Cyprus-based RAF Flight Lieutenant, aged 39 with 20 years' service)**

## Lessons learned for spouse employment

This section provides advice and lessons learned in relation to the provision of spouse employment support<sup>7</sup>. Together with the recommendations of this report (see below, following conclusions), lessons learned provide advice potentially for *all* providers of spouse employment support, not just future ventures of support undertaken by the MOD.

1. The value of the training opportunities spouses were able to access as a result of the training grant was considered by the majority of respondents as the most important aspect of their participation. Regardless of whether or not similar training grants are provided to spouses as a component of future provision, it is important to recognise that one of the most effective ways of supporting spouses to enhance their career and employment prospects appears to be providing them with opportunities to train to enhance their skills, knowledge and qualifications in their chosen field.
2. Spouses would benefit further from bespoke services tailored to their needs and circumstances (i.e., in contrast to ‘piggy backing’ spouse support onto existing provision offered to Service Personnel and Service Leavers). Specific examples of where services can be better tailored include a) the documentation which is used to process applications, which was criticised by some Trial participants for possessing military levels of complexity, b) ensuring that the timing and location of workshops is suitable for spouses to attend given other commitments such as existing work and childcare arrangements.
3. Better administration is required for the provision of employment support to spouses. In Cyprus, there were dedicated staff, with clear roles, whose function and responsibilities had been planned in advance. In this location, running of the Trial generally went smoothly, timelines were followed, and there was generally more positive feedback from the management, administration and the participants. By contrast, in the UK, the personnel charged with the running of the Trial were not dedicated to it exclusively, and had to perform these duties in addition to their existing roles, or else try and adapt to manage them from within their roles. This resulted in an element of confusion and perhaps even ‘mission fatigue’. In addition to bespoke services, our evaluation therefore highlights the importance of dedicated staffing resources for providing employment support to spouses.

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<sup>7</sup> We do not comment specifically on lessons learned about the *running of the Trial*, which are covered in a separate brief to the MOD. Rather, we concentrate on how spouse employment support more generally can be improved, in order to ensure that our comments are relevant to all future ventures in provision for spouses.

4. Spouse employment support can provide military spouses with the tools and the confidence they need to better pursue employment. However, even with good spouse employment support provisions in place, our findings show that spouses will still struggle to look for work if other issues – particularly the availability of affordable childcare in remote locations – are not addressed. For spouses who were parents of young children, the issue of childcare – more than any other – is what was perceived to limit opportunities for engaging in job seeking, gaining employment, or even in fully participating in employment support activities. Efforts to support spouses in seeking and gaining employment therefore also need to take into consideration the many barriers that spouses are likely to face (as highlighted earlier in our report), and to consider these as part of a holistic approach to supporting spouses and military families.

## Limitations

A number of challenges and limitations were experienced during the evaluation of the Trial that impacted on data collection. Ideally, T1 questionnaire data would have been collected as participants entered the Trial, in order to measure their well-being and confidence in job seeking before any engagement with the Trial support. However, the evaluation was commissioned after the Trial had started and the necessity to obtain an opinion from the MOD Research and Ethics Committee delayed these data collections by 8 months. This meant that T1 questionnaires were sent to spouses at the 8 months point, and the T2 questionnaire 6 months later. This limits the conclusions that can be made regarding the effect of the Trial on well-being and confidence in job-seeking.

Furthermore, in order to ensure all spouses had the opportunity to complete the questionnaires, those spouses who began the programme between September 2016 and March 2017 were all sent the T1 questionnaire in May 2017 (varying from 2 to 8 months after beginning the Trial). This was to ensure these spouses had the opportunity to complete the T2 questionnaire by November 2017 (6 months later). Again, this discrepancy in T1 data collection limits the conclusions that can be drawn from the data, as some spouses would have been further through the Trial than others when completing the T1 questionnaire.

Despite these problems the quantitative measures achieved a typical response rate for online survey research (Nulty, 2008; Schonlau et al, 2002), at least on the initial round of data collection (T1). However, given the relatively small number of participants in the Trial and low response rate at follow-up data collection (T2), the quantitative data therefore provides an *indication* of the impact of the SES Trial. The low response rate made comparison between the UK and Cyprus arm of the Trial difficult when looking at the feedback and impact of the Trial measured by the Value Added Questions.

In contrast, the qualitative information contains detailed feedback from participating spouses and Service Personnel, and data saturation (i.e., the point at which further interviews yielded no new information, only repetition of existing themes) was achieved toward the end of the interview phase of the study. Accordingly, the qualitative data provides a wealth of information about the impact of the SES Trial, and thus provides the weight of evidence on which the report's conclusions are based.

## Conclusions

The evaluation of the MOD Spouse Employment Support Trial has highlighted the value placed by military spouses of being recognised as valued constituents in their own right. Overall, the impact of the Trial, as a program of supporting spouses to improve their job seeking skills, has been positive with statistically significant improvements in the participants' belief in their ability to obtain better job seeking outcomes. Most of the spouses who engaged with the Trial saw it as a positive contribution from the military to help them either get back into employment, or else improve their employability by means of training and support. This presents further evidence to support the paradigm shift in the way that families are considered and policies developed. Analysis of the most recent AFCAS surveys has already shown that one of the most commonly recorded reasons for personnel leaving the military is suitable employment opportunities for spouses. The design of this evaluation was not able to show any detectable impact on decisions by Serving Personnel to leave or remain in the military. Our research suggests that other factors may have been more important in influencing this decision.

Within this brief study we have shown that: participants appeared little different from the civilian population in terms for their desire for employment as an important part of their sense of self. This is contrary to a traditional, outdated and pejorative view of the military spouse as a passive homemaker and "follower of the drum." However, the Trial did show that military spouses were, in the main part, underemployed and the underutilisation of the skills and experience of military spouses should be addressed for the benefit of the whole economy.

Participation in the trial was valued primarily for confidence building amongst the participants and providing them with skills and techniques that would be of value in the job market. Although participants referred to financial concern as one motivation for seeking employment, most spouses primarily endorsed 'personal' reasons such as needing to work to gain a sense of independence and mental wellbeing. An indirect effect of the training was also to engender a more positive relationship between the spouses and the military institution. The availability of the Trial provided a sense of reciprocity for the career compromises military spouses felt they had made in order to enable their partners' careers.

The availability of a training grant was identified as an important motivator for people engaging in the Trial (93%). However, only 57% of the participants actually utilised this. Although detailed on registration, the tax implications to the SP, were often not fully understood and, our analysis showed that in some cases, this led to misunderstandings and disquiet. The ability to use this grant to undertake training and courses to enhance their employability was seen by many of the participants as key.

The subjects showed no difference in wellbeing between the two measurement points in the Trial, however methodological and data collection challenges meant that these

data were not as robust as we would have liked and the numbers of respondents, especially at the second data collection point, were low. Interestingly, the wellbeing score for the spouses were consistently lower than the population average. Although it was not possible to show whether this was a statistically significant result, it was in line with previous findings (Trewick & Miller, 2014) that showed military spouses had lower wellbeing scores than their civilian counterparts. This appears to be an ongoing trend that would benefit from consistent monitoring and a more nuanced understanding of the reasons for this disparity.

Although the impact of the Trial has shown to be important for those that participated, the conversion from registration to active participation in the programme was not 100% (87.1%, or 379 out of 435, spouses engaged with CTP following registration). A number of participants registered onto the Trial and then did not take advantage of the provision available. In effect blocking access to the Trial for others who may have benefit from inclusion. This is despite the efforts of the Trial staff to replace approximately 15 spouses in December 2016 who were deemed non-responders by the service.

This was a difficult Trial to administer and deliver, and this was reflected in the themes and comments made by the participants and by the staff responsible for delivery. It is possible that some applicants may have been put off by the perceived difficulties in accessing the Trial in the first place. This, however, is conjecture as a study of potential applicants was not undertaken. Where the Trial was delivered in a discrete and more manageable location (e.g., Cyprus) with dedicated staff, the overall experiences of the participants were more positive.

## Recommendations

**The outcomes of the evaluation suggest that the trial had a positive impact on meeting the employment support needs of military spouses.**

**Recommendation 1:** One of the repeated themes throughout the evaluation was the impact of the MOD recognising military spouses as individual agents in their own right. It is recommended that the MOD should continue to provide support and assistance to help Military Spouses into the employment market, via the embedding of the Trial into practice as usual. This support does though need to be nuanced to take into consideration accessibility: more on-line and distance training opportunities should be made available.

**Recommendation 2:** An indirect effect of the Trial was also to build a stronger relationship between the spouses and the military institution. The availability of the Trial provided a sense of reciprocity for the career compromises military spouses felt they had made in order to enable their serving partners' careers. If it is not possible to provide the same provision as in this trial, the MOD should consider other mechanisms and policy initiatives that recognise the contributions and sacrifices made by military spouses.

**Recommendation 3:** The evaluation highlighted some of the barriers that military spouses felt both impacted on their ability to take part in the Trial and on their ability to obtain employment in general. The findings indicate the importance of appropriate and easily accessible childcare and transport provision, especially for military families who are in remote or isolated postings, and these are key tenets of the MOD Family Strategy (MOD, 2016). If the MOD are unable to provide these resources directly, consideration should be given to how these services could be improved for military families. Collaboration with local community services, such as Local Authorities, charities or other public sector provision, should be prioritised.

**Recommendation 4:** Self-efficacy and choice for the spouse, through the provision of a training grant, was shown to be one of the biggest motivators and positive influences of the Trial. It is recommended that the MOD continue to provide training grants to spouses.

**Recommendation 5:** Alongside dedicated training grant provision, other mechanisms to enable spouses to choose and manage employment-related training opportunities should be considered. These could include enabling spouses to access employment training opportunities that are available to their serving partner, or the development of a mechanism for joint access to learning credits.

**Recommendation 6:** There are a number of organisations offering employment support and advice to military spouses, some of whom are listed in appendix 2. The results of the survey suggest that there was not a particularly high utilisation of these important resources by the Trial participants. It is recommended that these

organisations and the MOD work together to ensure that spouses are aware of the provision and support they provide.

**Recommendation 7:** Underemployment and underutilisation of skills that Military Spouses bring to employers was a theme in this research. It is recommended that employers consider more flexible employment arrangements to mitigate the impact of mobility and the military lifestyle thus capitalising on this important resource.

**Recommendation 8:** The evaluation of the Trial has shown that it had an overall positive influence on the participants and helped to improve their confidence within the job market. It is recommended that further longitudinal studies are carried out to understand the legacy of this Trial on those that participated and importantly to see whether the provision of spouse employment support has any impact on retention or successful transition out of the military.

## Acknowledgements

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## Glossary

AFCAS	Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey
ARU	Anglia Ruskin University
CTP	Career Transition Partnership
DSA	Data Sharing Agreement
FAMCAS	Families Continuous Attitudes Survey
JFC	Joint Forces Command (Cyprus)
JSSE	Job Search Self-Efficacy
MOD	Ministry of Defence
RAF	Royal Air Force
SES	Spouse Employment Support
WEMWBS	Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Demographic profile of those who did and did not engage with the Trial.

	<b>Engaged (n=379)</b>	<b>Did not engage (n=56)</b>
<i>Mean age (range)</i>	35 years (22 to 59 years)	36 years (21 to 54 years)
<i>Nationality</i>	93% British 1% American 6% Other*	96% British 2% Bulgarian 2% German
<i>Trial Arm</i>	55% Cyprus 45% UK	55% Cyprus 45% UK
<i>Cyprus Locations</i>	(n=209) 45% Episcopi 28% Akrotiri 13% Dhekelia 14% Ayios Nikolaos	(n=31) 39% Episcopi 32% Akrotiri 19% Dhekelia 10% Ayios Nikolaos
<i>UK Locations</i>	(n=170) 26% South East 21% East of England 17% West Midlands 11% East Midlands 9% Yorkshire and the Humber 5% London 5% Wales 4% North East 2% Scotland	(n=25) 20% South East 20% East of England 20% West Midlands 12% East Midlands 12% Scotland 8% London 8% Yorkshire and the Humber
<i>(Partner) Service Branch</i>	33 % Army 65 % RAF 2% Navy	32% Army 68% RAF
<i>(Partner) Rank</i>	78% Non-Commissioned 22% Commissioned	69% Non-commissioned 31% Commissioned
<i>Education Level</i>	32% Degree or above 68% Below degree level	33% Degree or above 67% Below degree level

<i>Economic Group</i>	43% Employed seeking betterment 40% Unemployed seeking work 17% Economically inactive	43% Employed seeking betterment 37% Unemployed seeking work 20% Economically inactive
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\*With less than 1% attributed to each of 17 different nationalities.

## Appendix 2: Demographics of the Interview Participants

	<b>Spouses (n=30)</b>	<b>Service Personnel (n=23)</b>
<b>Cyprus</b>		
<i>Nationality</i>	94% British 6% Danish	92% British 8% Caribbean
<i>Mean age (range)</i>	36 years (26-48 years)	37 years (30-48 years)
<i>Locations</i>	44% Episcopi 28% Akrotiri 22% Dhekelia 6% Ayios Nikolaos	58% Episcopi 25% Akrotiri 17% Dhekelia
<i>Branch*</i>	50% Army 50% RAF	58% RAF 42% Army
<i>(Partner) Rank</i>	83% Non-commissioned 17% Commissioned	83% Non-commissioned 17% Commissioned
<b>UK</b>		
<i>Nationality</i>	100% British	100% British
<i>Mean age (range)</i>	37 years (27-47 years)	41 years (30 to 48 years)
<i>Locations</i>	25% South East 25% North East 17% East of England 17% East Midlands 17% Scotland	27% South East 27% North East 18% Scotland 18% Yorkshire & Humber 9% East Midlands
<i>Branch</i>	100% RAF	100% RAF
<i>(Partner) Rank</i>	58% Non-commissioned 42% Commissioned	55% Non-commissioned 45% Commissioned

\*Whilst the Cyprus-based arm of the Trial was tri-service, there was only a small number of Royal Navy spouses and Service Personnel (3%), none of whom were available for interview.

## Appendix 3: Organisations offering employment support and advice to military spouses

### RBLI Lifeworks Programme

A programme offering a support service to help military spouses and partners get the job they want.

Website: <https://www.wearelifeworks.org.uk/families/>

Contact: [lifeworks@rbli.co.uk](mailto:lifeworks@rbli.co.uk)

0800 319 6844

### Recruit 4 Spouses

An independent social enterprise, run largely by people whose spouses are serving in the Armed Forces, aiming to help military spouses find a job or start a business that works for them.

Website: <http://www.recruitforspouses.co.uk/>

Contact: [info@recruitforspouses.co.uk](mailto:info@recruitforspouses.co.uk)

0333 2020 996

### Unsung Heroes (University of Wolverhampton Business Start-up Programme)

Business start-up course and mentoring programme for the dependents of Armed Forces community, run by experienced and knowledgeable business advisers.

Website: <http://www.wlv.ac.uk/study-here/hm-armed-forces/business-start-up-courses/dependants-business-start-up-programme/>

Contact: [SUH@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:SUH@wlv.ac.uk)

01902 321272

### X Forces

Service providing ongoing support for enterprise and business start-up in the Armed Forces community, including military spouses.

Website: <https://www.x-forces.com/>

Contact: [info@x-forces.com](mailto:info@x-forces.com)

0800 3689533