

# Revisiting the Transition Mapping Study

Research Review 2016

Working paper by  
The Futures Company  
for Forces in Mind Trust

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It has not been subjected to expert or stakeholder review, and represents the views and opinions of The Futures Company, and not necessarily those of Forces in Mind Trust.

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### 1. Introduction

The Transition Mapping Study [TMS] (FiMT/TFC, 2013) identified five recurring themes:

- the transition experience is highly varied
- the differences between military and civilian life are underestimated
- families are important to good transitions, and should be better supported
- financial awareness and competence is important to a good transition
- the provision of support is improving, but in a somewhat piecemeal fashion.

It further identified six broad strategies for the improvement for transition support:

- developing transferable skills while in Service
- fostering independence and autonomy while in Service
- engaging with and supporting the family
- personalise the pathway
- tracking the right things (i.e. developing a deeper and more thorough understanding of the transition process from end to end)
- investing to reduce risk.

In the years since the TMS was published, some adjustments have been made to the formal support offer—most notably a broadening of the franchise for the Career

Transition Partnership [CTP] programme, and greater support for spouses and families of Service leavers. However, some of the themes and strategies recommended by the TMS have received little official attention or implementation (transferable skills, independence and autonomy, financial competence), and the dichotomy between military culture and that of the civilian population remains largely unexamined.

### 2. Reform

Recent reforms of Service leaver support are best understood in the context of the report of the Armed Forces Covenant Taskforce (AFCT, 2010), and of the Ashcroft report on Veterans' Transition (Ashcroft, 2014, 2015).

Many of the Covenant Taskforce's conclusions are echoed in the TMS. Headline recommendations include career-planning support, formal education structures and "life-skills" development, together with the fostering of greater personal responsibility and independence; raising entry-level recruiting standards; and addressing institutionalised patterns of alcohol abuse. The Taskforce stated that "those recruits who come from deprived backgrounds [...] are those most at risk, both of leaving the Service early and of then failing to settle satisfactorily back into civilian life".

The government's response to the Taskforce (HMG, 2010) acknowledges the soundness of its general conclusions, but points largely to existing models within the Armed Forces as a work-in-progress

toward addressing the issues raised. It rejects the possibility of, specifically, the Army altering its recruitment requirements, and states that substance abuse is a matter for the chain-of-command to handle.

The Ashcroft report (2014) provided six recommendations for improving transition outcomes:

- a concerted effort to change public perceptions of ex-Service personnel
- obliging all Service personnel to create a 'personal development plan'
- broadening the support franchise to all Service leavers who have completed basic training
- creating a work placement scheme for Service leavers
- creating a 24/7 single point of contact for Service leaver support organisations
- creating a directory of veterans' charities.

The public perceptions problem has gone unaddressed, perhaps because of its long-term nature, and the charities landscape remains fragmented. However, the support franchise has been broadened, with all ESLs now entitled to (though not obliged to take) support from the Career Transition Partnership, a service administered in partnership with a private sector employment firm. Meanwhile, the Army has developed the Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) framework, intended to smooth the transition process and mesh with the CTP offer; this takes the form of a series of newsletters and data sheets providing information about civilian life. It places the onus for success on the Service leaver:

*“Transition is a personal responsibility. It will not be done for you or to you, although information and encouragement will be provided by the Chain of Command. Individuals must recognize the value of Transition and utilize the information and opportunities that are available to act upon.”*

### 3. Context

It is worth noting that these are troubled times with regard to employment and social security in the UK, for Service leavers and civilians alike. The 2016 continuous attitude surveys (HMG 2016a, HMG2016b) indicates a slight but ongoing decline in job satisfaction, morale, and satisfaction with base life among Service people, with the most-cited retention factors being job security, healthcare provision, pensions, and mental health care provision (with 48% citing the latter, a 10% increase on 2015); exit factors include the impact of Service on family or personal life, and poor job satisfaction. They also identify an ongoing increase in the proportion of spouses in employment, which speaks to a general increase in financial precarity making itself felt within the Armed Forces as well as without, together with a possible recomposition of the workforce.

Post-EU referendum uncertainties preclude the plausible forecasting of medium- to long-term economic trends. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that even if recent growth in the employment market is sustained, many of the jobs created are likely to be more of the same: low-waged, low-skilled, insecure, and contested. Likewise, support for jobseekers in general has been stripped away.

## 4. Recent intervention evaluations

With regard to the Career Transition Partnership, the government (HMG 2016c) reports fairly stable results, despite the renewal of the contract in 2015; however, this assessment focuses only on those eligible for the full support provision of CTP; “employment outcomes for ESLs were not included in these employment outcome statistics.”

Evaluations of Early Service Leaver [ESL] support programs and interventions are few, but those that exist tend to report some degree of success, on the basis of successful employment outcomes, user feedback, or both.

A 2013 assessment of the Future Horizons programme at Catterick (FiMT/FH) reports good outcomes, and 84% of clients engaging with the programme post-transition, though it also notes a fall-off in sign-ups after launch. Future Horizons is perhaps the best data we have regarding outcomes for those ESLs at the highest risk for poor transitions: its client demography skews to white males, but its intake of trained men was predominantly Service No Longer Required (a Forces euphemism for a misconduct sacking), while the untrained men were predominantly Discharge As Of Right (which is to say they quit prior to completing their transition into the Armed Forces).

Academic studies are rare in this sector, but Warren *et al* (2015) took a qualitative look at a “vocational case management programme” run by Durham Primary Care Trust in partnership with the British Legion; interviewees from the programme reported being listened to, feeling valued by support staff, “having their problems

taken seriously”, and “being treated as an individual” as the most valuable aspects. The personal, tailored nature of the support was particularly appreciated.

An evaluation of the Finchale Joint Transition Support Service [JTSS] (FiMT/Nemhdu 2016) notes the paucity of pertinent evidence and research in the field. The strengths of the JTSS, as reported by clients, included “the holistic family centred approach, knowledgeable and empathic frontline staff, sustained personal contact over time and the long term perspective underpinning by the service. Challenges were highlighted around defining meaningful measures of success, improving awareness and better publicising the service and increasing resources to provide a sustainable service into the future.” However, the demographic statistics for Finchale skew strongly toward white, male ESLs in receipt of medical discharges; as such, successes here may not necessarily transfer to the most at-risk categories of ESL.

An evaluation of the LifeWorks programme from the Royal British Legion Industries (L&WI, 2016) has shown significant success in improving employability outcomes for the 600 Service leavers who have become ‘delegates’ of the programme, 79% of whom have a health condition or disability. LifeWorks consists of a five-day employment-focused residential course followed by ongoing remote support. The course develops understanding of soft skills and perceptions alongside hard skills and job seeking. One year after completing the programme, over half of delegates were in employment, and three-quarters of these in full-time employment. Those who completed the programme reported a clearer understanding of the

applicability of their skills, improved ability to gain employment, a more positive attitude towards their job search and career, and a strengthening of family and social relationships through greater self-awareness. All delegates interviewed as part of the evaluation would recommend LifeWorks to a friend, and the only significant criticism was one of accessibility: delegates hoped the programme would reach a wider pool of ex-Service personnel and rolled out regionally. Currently, the client demography of LifeWorks skews towards older men with an atypical number of years of service.

Given the difficulty in comparing support programmes (particularly when there are so few examples), it seems reasonable to conclude that transition support programmes work when they are informed, targeted and sincere, and pay attention to individual needs. This is in contrast to the IPPD, which effectively leaves the responsibility for a good transition with the Service leaver.

## 5. Recent research

Further research on transitions in general has come to similar conclusions.

The “Back to Civvy Street” report (FiMT/StGH 2014) reiterates the demographic vulnerability raised by the Covenant Taskforce, and further highlights the huge cultural dichotomy between what is expected of a good Serviceperson and what is expected of a good employee in the modern workplace. It notes the centrality of 'comradeship' to military life, and its relative absence in the civilian sphere.

“Transitions in Scotland” (SVC 2015) supported the Ashcroft recommendation for the extension of CTP to all ESLs regardless of length of service, but focused on the particular problems experienced by Service leavers in Scotland (where systems of local government differ from those in England and Wales) It recommended that the Scottish government open up its existing programs for youth employment support to ESLs, as well as identifying as successful three small support schemes. Of the three, one subsidised wages for employers who hire ESLs, a second supported ESLs with learning disabilities.

The Military Families & Transition report (FiMT/CfSJ, 2016), following Ashcroft and others, recommends further bolstering the support for spouses and families of transitioning Service leavers. The demography of the study skews toward those with longer periods of service, and those who underwent deployment; supporting the family may have less impact on at-risk ESLs.

A systematic review titled Families Support to Transition (FiMT/RAND 2016) concludes that evidence and solid research

into transition is sorely lacking, up to and including comparable initiatives overseas—a conclusion borne out by this review. It identifies a number of priorities for further research. These research priorities are focused on post-transition outcomes while paying little attention to pre-Service circumstances or Services culture—factors which are repeatedly implicated in the studies above, and which deserve greater attention.

Finally, research on the employment of Service leavers found that the skills of leavers were likely to correspond to skills gaps in the labour market. (FiMT/Deloitte, 2016).

## **6. Other academic research**

The transition of Service leavers into employment specifically seems not yet to have appeared on the academic radar. However, the more general transition between the Armed Forces and civilian life is a topic of concern. The interlocking nature of social challenges means that there may be material pertinent to the present enquiry: while “the needs of ex-Service personnel are defined by factors other than unemployment ... they do relate back to unemployment in some capacity” (Brunger et al, 2009).

### **6a. Relationship difficulties**

As described above, numerous reports and studies have identified the family as a key site for support and intervention (e.g. FiMT/CfSJ, 2016); however, placing the burden of support on an already strained relationship can only enhance the risk of poor outcomes. As with transition more broadly, empirical studies into post-deployment family challenges are notable by their absence (Berle & Steel, 2015), but key factors in Service

leaver relationship issues have been identified, namely childhood adversity, limited support from partners, being unmarried, financial problems, overdeployment, and challenging employment circumstances (Keeling et al, 2015).

### **6b. Mental health**

Contrary to public perception, the incidence of PTSD is fairly low in Service leavers (and not clearly associated with deployment). There is, though, an apparent link between deployment and increased drinking and violent behaviour (Hunt et al, 2014). Meanwhile, anger problems in Service personnel are shown to correlate with PTSD, psychological distress in service, alcohol abuse, active combat roles, childhood adversity and childhood antisocial behaviour [ASB] (Rona et al, 2015). Furthermore, “pre-enlistment ASB was associated with increased risk of negative behavioural outcomes (severe alcohol misuse, outbursts of anger or irritability, fighting or assaultative behaviour and risk-taking behaviour) ... suggesting that such background information may identify individuals who are more vulnerable to subsequent behavioural disturbance” (McManus et al, 2012).

It bears noting that the Service experience is inherently collective, however, and that “[g]reater self-reported levels of unit cohesion, morale and good leadership” appear to be associated with lower levels of common mental health issues and PTSD (Jones, 2014). If successful assimilation into the functional social structure of the unit protects against dysfunction, then might the opposite also apply, with failed assimilation (or assimilation into a dysfunctional

structure) nurturing dysfunction? The statistics are clear in showing that the majority of Service leavers reintegrate well and find work, but those with poor mental health during service are more likely to leave early, and more likely to end up unemployed on doing so. Furthermore, Service leavers “with mental health problems during service seem to be at higher risk of social exclusion after leaving” (Iversen et al, 2005).

### **6c. Offending and prison**

Factors such as pre-Service demography, social exclusion, alcohol abuse and financial problems are better predictors for offending in Service leavers than e.g. homelessness, deployment, or PTSD (McManus, 2011).

### **6d. Seeking help**

Service leavers in the prison system “consider it [prison] an opportunity to access support but find it difficult to ask for help”; having staff with some knowledge of military matters appears to encourage help-seeking (Wainwright et al, 2016). Outside the prison system, only 40% of Service leavers with mental health issues seek help with them. Stigma around perceptions of mental health is considered to be a significant barrier to help-seeking, although a metastudy found few associations that provide solid support to that theory (Sharp et al, 2014). The language most often endorsed by respondents about the two stigma concerns is relevant here: “my unit leadership might treat me differently”; “I would be seen as weak”.

There is some evidence to suggest that the fear of being misunderstood or judged leads to Service leavers withholding their military experiences in therapeutic

contexts; military-trained therapists can introduce extra complications “related to rank and power, stigma, and the fear of personal information going on record”. Successful outcomes are facilitated by “friendly, relational style” of therapy, and “robustness in the face of high emotion” on the part of the therapist; this results in a recommendation “to approach working with this client group in terms of cultural difference” (Stack, 2013).

### **6e. Identity and culture**

Service leavers “revealed a strong identification with, and sense of belonging to the military, often referred to as ‘the family’”; they also “implicitly and explicitly retained the values and ideology of the Armed Forces”, and “shared the strongly-held belief in a significant gulf between military and civilian worlds,” which is “exacerbated by the lack of a common language and vast differences in... experiences” (Stack, 2013). Indeed, Service leavers experience leaving as “a loss” of a pathway: the notion of identity seems important, “illustrating that the transition from military to civilian life can be viewed as a shift in sense of self from soldier to citizen”. It is possible that a poor transition outcome is related to difficulties in securing this new sense of post-Service identity.

Demography appears to have a strong influence on personnel becoming ESLs, while active service appears not to; early departure from the Services is associated with “younger age, female sex, not being in a relationship, lower rank, service in the Army, [and] reporting higher levels of childhood adversity” (Buckman et al, 2012). In general, Service leavers are more likely to report common mental disorders [CMD] or PTSD, and report “less social

participation outside work and a general disengagement with military social contacts in comparison with serving personnel" (Hatch et al, 2013). There is an implication here that Service leavers feel that leaving is (or is seen as) a permanent breach with 'the family'. This loss of belonging is likely jarring in and of itself, given the stress of transitioning from a culture that is close-knit and familiar (in both senses of that term) to one that is comparatively unregimented and unfamiliar. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that such a transition would be doubly jarring to those whose integration into 'the family' was truncated or unsuccessful, representing as it does a transition from one form of alienation to another.

The notion of "institutionalisation" is commonplace in popular accounts of transition. Originally the term was used to describe psychiatric patients who no longer rebelled against incarceration. It is a poor sociological model for the military experience. "(Reverse) culture shock" may be a better model, particularly in the context of the transition between military and civilian worlds (in either direction): the conformity and subordination-of-self which prevails in the Armed Forces contrasts with the self-starting individualist consumerism that governs the world outside (Bergman et al, 2014). Given leavers with longer service appear to have better transition, perhaps poor outcomes for ESLs are associated less with the military mindset clashing with the civilian world, and more with an incomplete assimilation into the military mindset which might have provided a working alternative to the standard suite of civilian life-skills and coping strategies.

As Cooper et al (in press) observe,

*"military and civilian fields require different sorts of cultural competences and are structured by particular values, and are characterised by different ways of communicating and relating to others, different living arrangements, different criteria for "success", and different standards of behaviour."*

New sociological models developed to deal with transitions between vastly different cultural settings, while not designed with military transition in mind, might be of some value in reframing the challenges of transition into more general terms, and thus providing a greater depth of precedence and evidence on which to draw. The concept of 'context collapse' was coined by researchers attempting to understand how individuals decide how to present themselves in the public spaces of social media networks, noting that such technologies "collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques online that they do to handle multiplicity in face-to-face conversation"; managing context collapse results in strategies of self-presentation and image management "including targeting different audiences, concealing subjects, and maintaining authenticity" (Marwick & Boyd 2010).

Given the studies mentioned above, in which anxieties over identity, belonging and 'fitting in' (not only to civilian culture on leaving, but in some cases also to the military 'family') seem to have some correlation to problems in transition, and further given that the strategies developed to deal with context collapse run counter to the subservience to singular authority which military Service demands, it seems that reconceiving transition as a collapse of the Service leaver's context might present opportunities for understanding

the Service leaver experience from a more personal and subjective perspective. The implication is this is therefore a crisis in their sense of identity, heightened by a new cultural context which expects them to know how to present their 'authentic' and individualised selves in the appropriate manner.

In a related vein, Cooper et al draw on concepts developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, of "habitus, capital, and field," as a way of understanding and discussing the adaptation processes involved in transition. Taken together, these concepts "explain how cultural settings operate according to their own internal logic, and how people—largely unconsciously—become competent social actors within these settings." As they note, "Military and civilian settings are not equal on either practical or emotional levels."

Given the approval that has been noted in evaluations for support and support systems which favour the personal and empathetic approach, framings such as these might also offer a way to "drill down" into the diversity of transition outcomes and achieve a more granular understanding of the difficulties facing Service leavers of all levels.

## 7. Summary

Strategies outlined in the TMS as potentially supportive of improved transition outcomes have been picked up and echoed in subsequent high-level reports (e.g. the Ashcroft Report, Transitions In Scotland). As a result, the MOD has extended (as of the October 2015 re-let of the contract) the lower tier of the support franchise, the Career Transition Partnership, and made it available to all ESLs regardless of time in Service or reason for discharge; however,

the CTP offer is primarily a passive online resource-set, and the onus for a successful transition remains explicitly with the Service leaver themselves. In his first follow-up report (Ashcroft 2015b), Ashcroft welcomes the rolling-out of the CTP across all Service leavers, but notes that "this will probably benefit the contractor more than the individual". Meanwhile, morale and job satisfaction in the Armed Forces continue to decline, with an increasing proportion of spouses in employment, while the broader economic picture is at best uncertain, and at worst unpromising.

Recent evaluations show good outcomes from support programmes where the support is individualised and empathetic to the Service leaver and their experience. More general research into transition has reiterated the importance of the family as a support mechanism, and highlighted the demography of the most at-risk ESLs, who tend to come from (and return to) challenging or adverse circumstances.

Academic research into Service leavers tends to focus on mental health issues in particular, with transition outcomes at best a secondary concern; nonetheless, there is some germane data to be found. Various studies downplay or rule out the role of dramatic factors such as overdeployment or PTSD in difficult transitions, but factors such as culture shock, identity crises and the military drinking culture are implicated. New sociological theories and models such as 'context collapse', while developed for the study of social media user behaviour, offer a reframing of the transition challenge which might allow a more subjective and qualitative understanding of the Service leaver experience, and hence the enhancement of future support programmes.

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Note that underlined titles are hyperlinked in electronic versions of this report.

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## About the Forces in Mind Trust

The Forces in Mind Trust was founded in 2012, through an endowment of £35 million from the Big Lottery Fund, to promote the successful transition of Armed Forces personnel, and their families, into civilian life.

Our **Vision** is that all ex-Service personnel and their families lead successful and fulfilled civilian lives. Our **Mission** is to enable them to make a successful and sustainable transition.

Our **Strategy** is to use our spend-out endowment to fund targeted, conceptually sound, evidence generation and influence activities that will cause policy makers and service delivers to support our Mission.

Full details of what we have funded, our published research, and our application process can be found on our web site [www.fim-trust.org](http://www.fim-trust.org).