

# Back to Civvy Street: How can we better support individuals to lead successful civilian lives after a career in the UK Armed Forces?

## REPORT

In partnership with



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## REPORT

St George's House is delighted to have partnered with Force in Mind Trust (FiMT) to deliver this consultation which aims to explore how we can better support Service leavers to lead more successful and fulfilling lives after they return to civilian life. Both organisations would like to extend their warm thanks to Sir Hew Strachan, for chairing the discussions, and to all the participants for their contribution to a high level and stimulating discussion.

This consultation had two specific objectives:

- (i) to explore how we can better support Service leavers to lead more successful and fulfilling lives after they have undergone transition to civilian life, recognising that transition is just the first step towards life after the Armed Forces, and that support might be required for a number of years as the service leaver and their family integrate back into civilian life.
- (ii) to make recommendations<sup>1</sup> on what needs to change to ensure the outcome of achieving a more fulfilling and successful civilian life becomes a reality for all serving personnel who undergo transition.

Our report does not provide a narrative of the discussions in the order that they took place. Rather, it seeks to draw together our discussions in a way that helps identify factors that impact on the success of transition of Service leavers<sup>2</sup> and their families, and brings together insights under the following headings:

- Essential components of a good transition (page 4)
- The minority who struggle: whom are we talking about? (pages 4 – 5)
- Responsibility (pages 6 – 7)
- Support (pages 8 – 9)
- Managing civilian perceptions and understanding (pages 10 – 11).

Each section of this summary includes both the key issues participants felt should be considered and, taking into account the planned changes to patterns of employment within the Services<sup>3</sup>, their vision of what transition should look like by 2020, and the actions that need to be taken to ensure this vision becomes a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> The recommendations made at this event drew on and frequently affirmed the findings and recommendations of recent research. In particular, UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community, the Royal British Legion (RBL), December 2014; Veterans Transition Review, Lord Ashcroft, February 2014; and Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013.

<sup>2</sup> There was some debate over whether the term Veterans or Service leavers should be used to describe ex-Service personnel. However, as reported on para 1, page 12 of the Transition Mapping Study "not all ex-Services personnel recognise themselves as being veterans". For this reason, we have agreed to use the term Service leavers in this report.

<sup>3</sup> Under the terms contained in The New Employment Model for service personnel (MOD), further information is available at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).



As with all St George's House reports, this document aims to outline from an independent standpoint the main ideas and views put forward during the Consultation, with the understanding that not everybody involved in the discussions may have endorsed all the proposals and viewpoints included.

Phrases that are italicised, and in speech marks, are direct unattributed quotes from the Consultation and have been included to provide greater context and understanding to the issue being discussed. A list of participants is included at the end of this report.

### **Essential components of a good transition**

At the start of the Consultation, participants agreed that our discussions should be focused on three central 'pillars' as the essential elements of a successful transition to civilian life. These were outlined as:

- Gaining access to meaningful and satisfying employment as a means of creating economic sustainability, "*together with adequate housing*"
- Benefiting from the stability and purpose that come from being part of a cohesive and fulfilling social network
- Creating a more positive perception within society of the Services as a means of supporting future career aspirations for civilian and Services/Reserves personnel.

The first two pillars could be considered to be as important to civilians as they are to Service leavers in terms of leading successful and fulfilling lives; bearing this in mind, participants were not suggesting that "Service leavers *should be given preferential treatment*" over civilians but, rather, they "*should not be disadvantaged because of their time spent in one of the Services*".

### **The minority who struggle: whom are we talking about?**

It is widely accepted that the majority of personnel leaving the Services make a 'good transition' to civilian life; this widely held view, however, is based on statistics that identify the number who secure employment and is flawed in two ways:

- The way in which the employment statistic is recorded does not necessarily equate to "meaningful and satisfying employment"
- In itself, 'employment' as a sole indicator of "good transition" is not fully able to indicate the broader spectrum of the remaining essential elements of a successful transition to civilian life as covered by the remaining two pillars listed under the previous heading.

However, although employment as an indicator of "good transition" is not a complete reflection of the three pillars outlined above, it was generally accepted as an indicator of better social integration and health (compared to that which might be found amongst unemployed people).



These statistics do not capture the employment of Early Service Leavers (ESLs)<sup>4</sup> who comprise a significant group of personnel leaving the Services. Information on the employment of ESLs is beginning to be collected through the Future Horizons Programme<sup>5</sup> designed to support ESLs, but as this is a voluntary programme the statistics may not fully reflect accurate civilian employment outcomes.

We know that the majority of Service leavers are from the Army<sup>6</sup> (which is no surprise given that the Army is the largest employer of the Armed Forces); and that as a Service, we know it is often perceived "to recruit young people from deprived socio-economic backgrounds with low educational attainment" (indeed nearly half of Army recruits have literacy and numeracy levels equivalent to an 11 year old on joining<sup>7</sup>). Participants felt therefore that it was a fair assumption to say that if these particular "young people" had not joined the Army, the likelihood is that "they would have found it difficult to secure employment as a civilian [anyway]".

It can therefore be assumed that if a significant number of personnel leaving the Services are ESLs, and if the majority of Service leavers are from the Army, then Army ESLs are more likely than not going to consist of a greater number of the vulnerable "young people" described in the previous paragraph and as such, be a group who struggle with achieving "good transition". However, that is not to say this is the only vulnerable group that struggle to achieve a successful transition outcome; for example, individual leavers from all of the Services can and do encounter "barriers to successful integration" in various guises.

A less easily defined group that it is felt struggle with transition is those who do not look beyond Service life. They do not view their Service career as a "time-limited episode". At best, their service career is likely to be a fixed number of years within their working lives; but even the initial fixed period for which they enlist may be cut unexpectedly short (for example, due to redundancy or medical discharge, amongst a number of other reasons). This group of Service leavers in particular find it difficult to transition as they have given little thought or preparation to life as a civilian.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2012/13, there were 23,830 Service leavers and a further 122 Service personnel who died in Service (Careers Transition Partnership quarterly statistics, Dec 2014). Of these Service leavers, a significant majority (81%) were eligible for support provided by Careers Transition Partnership, with some 19% (4,330 people) not eligible for such support and classified as Early Service leavers (ESLs). Since October 2013 however, such ESLs have been eligible for the Future Horizons support programme.

<sup>5</sup> Further information on the Future Horizons Programme, which is specifically targeted at supporting ESLs, is available at <https://www.ctp.org.uk/futurehorizons>.

<sup>6</sup> Of 18,570 leavers in 2009/10, 61.2% left from the Army, 19.5% the Navy and 19.3% from the RAF (para 3, page 6, Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Skills & Qualifications, page 19, Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013. In 2011/12 recruitment to the Armed Forces was split across the Services as follows: Royal Navy, 2,220; Army, 11,190; RAF, 1,390, page 17, Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013.



Participants proposed that by 2020 the following changes should be put into practice in order to improve the experience and outcomes of Service leavers who at present struggle with reintegration into civilian life. The improved picture in 2020 would look as follows:

- Every member of the Services has a "personal pathway of advice and support" that from recruitment onwards "prepares them for a successful transition into civilian life." This advice and support is not limited to finding immediate employment on leaving the Service, rather it prepares each Service person "to understand and navigate all aspects of civilian life"
- The principle of 'personalising' pathways means that the MOD no longer follows "a sheep dip approach" to preparing Service personnel for transition
- "Service leavers' families are fully involved in the process of transition while their family member is still in military Service"
- The MOD knows which groups of Service personnel "are likely to be the most vulnerable" with regard to barriers standing in the way of a good transition, and is able to offer specific support to such individuals
- The employment outcomes of ESLs will be better known through "a longitudinal study of the impact of the New Horizons Programme", and support has been adjusted accordingly
- A "case management system rather than a sign-posting approach" has been adopted to help vulnerable Service leavers, drawing on a 'tool kit' of training, advocacy and support"
- Research has been carried out with "professional sports youth programmes, the UK Olympic Operational Team, the Police Force and the Fire Brigade", organisations in which there is a significant likelihood that individuals will not always progress into a professional career and/or will need to consider other employment opportunities during their working lives. This research reveals potential "methodologies and approaches to prepare for Service personnel for life after Military Service", which are being trialled and, where successful, adopted.

## Responsibility

Throughout our discussions, when probed on whose responsibility it was to improve a particular aspect of transition, the response from participants was that "it is a shared responsibility". Naturally, depending on the stage of transition, and the aspect under discussion, those who should share the responsibility will change, with one exception.

There was consensus that a degree of responsibility always lies with the Service leavers themselves. It was felt that "everyone has to take responsibility for their own lives". However, it was also acknowledged that Service personnel and their families, particularly those living and working 'inside the wire', are "cocooned from many of the realities of civilian life".

It was pointed out that the "cultural differences between Service and civilian life are immense". To bring this to life, some participants highlighted how different the behaviours and social norms expected in the Services are compared with civilian society, and how behaviours which are valued within the Armed Forces do not necessarily hold the same level of value in a civilian setting.



Service personnel were described as typically operating in an environment that is:

- *"Institutional"*
- *"Hierarchical"*
- *"Deferential"*
- *"Risk averse"*
- *"With limited personal choice and life style"*

This does not reflect the civilian equivalent where it was argued that the somewhat opposing qualities of *"individual initiative"*, *"managed risk taking"* and *"the exercise of choice"* are preferred and valued.

It was recognised that for the MOD there is a real dichotomy that needs to be resolved. On the one hand, the qualities listed in the bullet points above were described as being *"part and parcel of being in the Services, especially the Army"*; while conversely, they create *"potential barriers to integrating successfully into civvy street"*.

Another fundamental change Service leavers can experience during transition is *"the loss of comradeship"*. The bond between Service personnel is extremely close, and it was pointed out that this bond *"is not confined to comrades who have shared direct personal experiences of military service together"* but rather that the camaraderie bond *"extends to all Service personnel"*.

The absence of this bond for Service leavers leads some to feel very isolated, and *"can contribute to depression, drug and alcohol abuse and family breakdown"*. Regimental and Service Associations do play a role in alleviating the feeling of isolation, but *"they are not accessible to all"*.

We agreed that, while still in service, preparing for a personal *"change of identity"* and the loss of the comradeship of being part of the 'military family', should not be the responsibility of the service person alone. There was however less agreement about what the specific responsibilities of MOD and military voluntary sector organisations should be in this process, and how far either should extend to support individuals while in service.

Despite the Armed Forces Community Covenant and Corporate Covenant, there was a strongly shared view that these had not been effective tools in terms of raising awareness about the roles and responsibilities placed on Local Authorities and Employers (respectively), nor in terms of ensuring that Service leavers do not face disadvantage because of their service when accessing public services or employment opportunities.

One person described the Community Covenant as *"a tiger without teeth"* in terms of its effectiveness in helping Service leavers establish themselves in civilian life. There was agreement that both Covenants require stronger levels of reporting and transparency if the commitments that they contain are to be taken more seriously.

The responsibilities of the military voluntary sector were considered to be clearer in so much as they fulfil their charitable objectives, but *"there is limited understanding of what is available, which charity can help whom, and in what circumstances"*. It was posited that Service leavers often find this information difficult to access.



Participants argued that by 2020 the following changes should be put into practice to improve the experience and outcomes of Service leavers who at present struggle with reintegration into civilian life. The improved picture in 2020 would look as follows:

- The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including Service leavers, in contributing to a 'good transition' "are clear and widely understood"
- The Community and Corporate Covenants have been reviewed in order to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' and are fully understood and workable at an operational level
- The Armed Forces Covenant and its requirements are supported by "the 'mapping' of responsibilities to identify duplication and gaps" and, where necessary, "redefining structures and roles so that they are fit for purpose"
- All Service personnel have a structured transition plan which includes their families within its scope, agreement and implementation. The development of this Plan will have grown from the introduction of 'My Plan' and the Army's 'Employment, Education, Housing, Health and Welfare' (E2H2W) transition tools.

## Support

A Service leaver and, importantly, their families, face "a lottery" when trying to access the support they need "at every stage of transition."

Whilst still in service, apart from in specific circumstances, families are generally not involved in the MOD's transition support processes. This means that the family is wholly reliant on the Service leaver for information that can contribute towards a 'good transition'.

Service leavers and their families who need particular types of support can turn to military charities for help. However, it was felt that the military voluntary sector is "disjointed and fragmented" and that many of those in need of help find it hard to know which charity to access<sup>8</sup>.

While it was recognised that some of the charities, especially the smaller ones, have been "set up for deeply personal reasons" and all "have different charitable objectives and identities", it was felt that there is a need to work more closely together "in order to reach as many as possible needing help and support".

It was also felt that Government need to "do more to co-ordinate the support that different Departments (e.g. MOD, BIS, DoH, CLG, DWP and others) and their Agencies provide" to Service leavers both during their time in service<sup>9</sup> and through transition. It was felt that "responsibility [for Service leavers] sits across too many Departments". Although representatives from different Government Departments with a shared interest in supporting Service leavers do meet regularly in the



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<sup>8</sup> It was asserted that there are around 2,000 charities in the military voluntary sector. While this number was challenged as being too high, it was widely accepted that there is a significant number and that the charities generally work independently of one another and that many have overlapping responsibilities.

<sup>9</sup> A significant barrier to Service leavers and their partners is that they lack skills and/or that the skills and accreditation which Service personnel achieve while in Service are not understood by employers. This issue is explored in greater depth in the next section.

Covenant Reference Group, it was argued that the creation of a senior civil servant position in the Cabinet Office as a "*champion at the centre of Government*" for Service leavers would help ensure "*better information flow and co-ordination, and greater visibility so that Service leavers do not suffer disadvantage*" compared to the civilian population.

Alongside a strengthened structure within Government, it was also considered an idea to follow Scotland's lead of appointing a Veterans Commissioner to independently represent the needs of Service leavers, from within Government. It was agreed that the progress of such an initiative should be monitored.

We saw the role of a UK Veterans Commissioner as someone who would represent and advocate on behalf of all Service leavers. A Commissioner would need to be accountable to the Service leavers themselves, and would need to play a "*challenging role*" with respect to central, devolved and local Governments and their Agencies, as well as to military charities, the media and any other key stakeholders that "*affect the quality of the transition and integration*" of Service leavers. It was recognised that the independence of a Commissioner would be of key importance to ensure effectiveness: he/she needs to be able stand apart and "*not be sucked into the politics of the process*".

It was pointed out that the success of a Commissioner depends significantly on "*the structure of Government and Ministerial buy-in*". In Scotland, "*a form of matrix Government operates that enables cross-Departmental focus on the needs of Service leavers*". Some participants were unsure whether the structure at Westminster, and the size and complexity of roles and responsibilities within the Civil Service, could support a UK-wide approach that mirrored Scotland. The appointment of Regional Commissioners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was also considered, but again, many felt that the regional Government structures needed for Commissioners to be fully effective were not currently in place.

*Participants proposed that by 2020 the following changes should be put into practice to improve the experience and outcomes of Service leavers who at present struggle with reintegration into civilian life. The improved picture in 2020 would look as follows:*

- "*Service leavers' families are fully involved in the process of transition while their family member is still in military Service*"
- The voluntary sector has "*rationalised the priorities of the different charities*" to reduce duplication and minimise the risk of Service leavers "*falling through the safety net which they collectively provide*"
- Military charities have "*created stronger networks and better information channels between themselves*" and also with Service leavers, case workers and mentors. This means that the support that each offers is "*understandable from the outside*", and that charities have developed a better overall understanding of the needs of vulnerable Service leavers
- Central Government Departments have a shared agreement "*of the distinction between a Service leaver and a citizen*", and "*joined-up and implemented policies to ensure that Service leavers are not disadvantaged*"
- The Armed Forces Community Covenant has been revised so that Local Authorities are "*clear about what this means in practice and implement it fully to ensure no Service leaver or their family is disadvantaged*" as a member of their community
- Local Authority Veteran Champions now receive "*adequate training and leadership support*" to carry out their roles effectively.



## Managing civilian perceptions and understanding

Our discussions with regard to civilian perceptions and understanding focused on two areas: media portrayal of Service leavers and employers' attitudes to recruiting ex-Service personnel and their partners.

There was general agreement that the media portrays Service leavers as either "*victims or heroes*"; anything other than these two extremes is not considered newsworthy. We drew on the headline 'myths' captured in the recently published UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community<sup>10</sup> and noted that these are widely accepted as fact by the general public, even though they are in reality untrue. These included:

- Veterans are more likely to take their own lives.
- Most Service personnel and Veterans suffer from mental health problems.
- Many Veterans are in prison.
- Many Veterans sleep rough.

However, while we recognised these mythical assertions as false, we also accepted the uncomfortable truth that their promotion "*stimulates charitable giving amongst the public who wish to support Service leavers*" and as such, does therefore have some merit.

Many participants liked the idea of developing a media campaign to portray a more positive perception of Service leavers along the lines of the successful Department of Health 'Time to Talk' campaign, which has been used to foster greater insight and understanding amongst employers and the public about people with mental health issues.

The 'Time to Talk' campaign does not rely on "*attention grabbing, shock horror stories*", but focuses on people with mental health conditions speaking for themselves: sharing their aspirations and telling their stories. This approach does not inspire guilt, fear or pity but instead challenges attitudes and preconceptions. It encourages the public and employers to understand how they, personally, can improve the quality of the lives of the one in four of us who will at some time experience mental health problems<sup>11</sup>.

We agreed that you "*can't change what the media reports and how it is presented. The sensational is always what sells*". Similarly, what is talked about through social media and the myths that are spread cannot be silenced. However, there is scope to "*change the narrative*" through longer-term campaigns which allow "*Service leavers to talk for themselves*".

One of the key target audiences in conveying "*the enormous contribution Service leavers can make*" is employers. Currently, this message is confused and incomplete. The Armed Forces Corporate Covenant could unhelpfully be construed as a tool "*to persuade employers that it is their duty to employ ex-Service personnel*" as though a corporate social responsibility in return for such individuals having put their lives at risk to protect the country. This message does not sit easily with the



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<sup>10</sup> Page V, Myth Busting, UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community, RBL, December 2014

<sup>11</sup> Time to Change campaign, MIND and Rethink Mental illness

arguably more powerful message that *"through their military service experience and training, Service leavers represent a quality recruitment pool who have proved and bring with them valuable qualities, skills and abilities"*.

At the same time one of the major barriers in getting a more positive and constructive message across to employers is that very often Service leavers themselves are unsure of how their experience, skills and qualifications relate to civilian employment. Unsurprisingly, Service leavers experiencing a loss of comradeship do not recognise that what in part they are missing is the use of skills associated with comradeship and being part of a team, both of which are in fact highly valued by employers.

Participants in the Consultation also confirmed the findings reported in the Transition Mapping Study<sup>12</sup>, that it appears that insufficient effort is made to:

- Design and deliver vocational training in ways that will meet skill needs in civilian settings as well as in the military
- Explain to Service personnel the relevance of specific types of training and accreditation to civilian jobs, so that they are confident when applying for jobs (this includes *"understanding how to translate Military terminology to that used in civilian life"*, interviewing skills and building the confidence of Service leavers to 'sell' their skills more effectively in a civilian setting)
- Ensure that the most vulnerable groups of Service personnel *"are given the opportunity to acquire employability and vocational skills during their time serving in the Military"*.

Our discussions strongly supported the proposition *"that from recruitment onwards, Service personnel need to prepare for transition"*. Placing training and accreditation within a Military silo, and failing to redress low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst some recruits do not help Service leavers find work in *"civvy street"*.

There is support provided for personnel approaching planned discharge from the Services. Those who have been in the Armed Forces for six years or more (around 40% of total leavers<sup>13</sup>) are entitled to the full Career Transition Partnership (CTP) resettlement programme; which includes work placements in the commercial sector for all ranks. However, this provision is not accessible to ESLs; in this case it is Future Horizons who provides support in finding work.

Both of these support mechanisms happen at the end of Service life; this was felt by many to be leaving it too late for the support to be fully utilised to prepare service leavers for the transition to civilian life (particularly as many other considerations occur at that point, such as finding schooling for children or securing civilian housing). It was suggested that there should instead be more of a dual approach to such support – an approach that forms an integral part of an individual's service life, and one which not only serves to reinforce the message that service life is for a limited period and that future civilian planning is required, but also ensures the development of the individual is relevant to a military setting.



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<sup>12</sup> Pages 20 – 21, Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013

<sup>13</sup> Page 30, Transition Mapping Study, FiMT, August 2013

Participants proposed that by 2020 the following changes should be put into practice to improve the experience and outcomes of Service leavers who at present struggle with reintegration into civilian life. The improved picture in 2020 would look as follows:

- "The Veterans Research Hub has become an established and trusted source of factual information
- Social media has strengthened the voice of Service leavers, playing an important part in challenging the myths and stereotyping reported by the mainstream media
- There is a widely understood 'read across' regarding the relevance of training, skills and qualifications acquired in a Military setting to civilian employment opportunities. This has been achieved by bringing together relevant Government Departments, Cobseo, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) and "influential business and industry networks", to agree a framework for translating Military accreditation and training into civilian language
- "Employers value Military experience and skills" because they now understand how Service leavers' skills and experiences can be utilised in a commercial setting. This change in perception has also persuaded many employers of the benefits of employing Reservists
- Service leavers regard their time in the Military as "as an interim episode in their careers. During their working lives they expect to set up their own businesses and/or work for more than one employer in a variety of jobs."

## Conclusions

Throughout our discussions we were conscious that over the next six years, with the introduction of the New Employment Model, there will be major changes in the way the Armed Forces are employed and managed. For example, in the Army, there will be significantly less regular movement of personnel and their families from base to base, and the number of Reservists is planned to grow.

At the same time, there will inevitably be changes in civilian life.

All these changes will affect the transition issues Service leavers have to tackle: some will be new and some the same. Some of the practical issues, such as finding housing and schools, may well be easier. However, the changes will not help employers understand the relevance of military training and accreditation to their businesses, or make the military voluntary sector easier to navigate from 'the outside'.

Some participants felt the challenge we took away from the Consultation was to consider in this changing landscape what the priorities should be, to ensure that all future Service leavers have the confidence, skills and support to make a successful transition.



## FINAL REFLECTIONS

*Sir Hew Strachan, Consultation Chair*

The Armed Forces Covenant, introduced in its current form in 2010-11, is not a throw-back to some perfect age, when British society and its armed forces were in step, when the former respected the sacrifices of the latter, and when those who had served their country were given privileges and rights. Historically Britain has never treated its veterans well, and what it has provided has as a result depended on a 'mixed economy', in which the deficiencies of state provision have been off-set by charitable efforts.

The Covenant is therefore an innovation, both in its legal status and in its entrenching more firmly the place of service charities in the fabric of provision for veterans. The improvements which have followed have undoubtedly been impressive, but problems remain. Underneath the branding lurks so much diversity, dependent on different government ministries, diverging practices in devolved and local administrations, and overlapping and sometimes competing charities, that many individuals feel confused. For the current service man or woman, as for the veteran, the issues tend to be more specific, the questions more precise, than the big title and its broad ambition suggest. The Armed Forces Covenant is at least a more catchy title than the preceding effort to address the issues, the Service Personnel Command Paper, but it is still failing to reach many of those whom it is designed to help. Those currently serving and their families frequently don't realise that it exists for their benefit. And if they don't understand that while they are in uniform, they are more likely to struggle to do so when they are out.

So communication is a major challenge: too much that is not relevant has been pushed into the Covenant, and has tended to obscure the things that both serving personnel and veterans see as really important, including housing and health. The addition of supplementary Covenants, addressed to employers or local governments, can sometimes confuse the situation further, especially if institutions sign up to them because it has become fashionable to do so but without appreciating their implicit obligations.

Over the last decade government has responded to the needs of veterans, and to the danger that remedies can fall into the gaps between the Ministry of Defence and other departments. But current structures do impose limitations on what can be achieved. Veterans do not enjoy a separate legal status from other citizens; nor should they. A democracy is committed (at least in theory) to equality of treatment for all its members. To give those who are serving or have served in the armed forces some special status or defined rights would not only undermine the compensating moral authority they currently enjoy in society, but also invite a backlash from other groups who are not so privileged.

Nonetheless, one anomaly sticks out. Ministerial responsibility for veterans rests with the Ministry of Defence, their former employer. However, the ministry is required to mitigate government spending, an obligation that can conflict with the duty of care for those whose pensions it pays. It can find itself acting as both judge and jury. At the same time, other departments, not the Ministry of Defence, meet the bulk of veterans' needs. The case for an independent commissioner or veterans' champion, capable of being their sole advocate without any potential conflict of interest, remains a powerful one. So far the UK government has resisted proposals for such an appointment. The Scottish government's appointment of a Veterans' Commissioner sets a precedent which should be watched with a view to possible emulation.



*Ray Lock, Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust*

In an age where time is our most precious resource, it would be fair to ask whether we have invested that which we spent at St George's House wisely. Perhaps, to quote out of context Zhou Enlai, it is too soon to tell. Much of what we discussed was already known by some, and some of it by most. Sharing ideas and information does possess a quality of its own, and for that reason alone I certainly left far better informed, as I hope did many others.

Did we though solve anything, or did we at least create new solutions to sadly enduring problems? I suspect that if we were to achieve a truly encyclopaedic view of transition, we would probably find that our innovative ideas had already been thought elsewhere, and our manoeuvrist approaches countered by the Pragmatists. In public and social policy, it can be hard to judge when a tipping point is reached, an idea takes root, policies are changed. The patient and steady accumulation of freshly-mined ideas can provide that driver for change. Which leads me to think that we did make progress, as immeasurably as the stationary see-saw, one end high up in the air but gaining the weight of sound arguments until it slowly moves to reverse its position.

And finally, did we leave with a new or a fortified network? Personally, I have since conversed with three others in as many weeks, whose existence was previously unknown to me, as was mine to them. Forces in Mind Trust has grown in confidence on the back of this successful event, and our reputation, credibility and hence influence have all grown just a little; I very much hope yours have too. Being more confident in our ideas; more confident in the voicing of them; and perhaps the greatest achievement of this consultation, more confident to think as part of our normal daily work. That's how we will deliver better civilian lives for those leaving our Services.



## PARTICIPANTS

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## ST GEORGE'S HOUSE

The House was founded in 1966 by H.R.H The Duke of Edinburgh and the then Dean, Robin Woods, as a place where people of influence and responsibility in every area of society can come together to explore and communicate their views and analysis of contemporary issues.

The House is located within Windsor Castle and forms part of the fourteenth century foundations of the College of St George. The heart of the College is St George's Chapel, where three times a day, every day, prayer is offered for the nation. That tradition of prayer, established in 1348 by King Edward III, has extended for more than six hundred years. It is precisely this tradition that gives the House its impetus and its wider theological context. The offering of prayer in the Chapel finds a practical expression in Consultations, where the House offers space for nurturing Wisdom.

Today our Consultation programme focuses on three distinct areas: contemporary issues, service to the Church, and hospitality for groups who, understanding the ethos and core objectives of the House, bring to us their own Consultations. Taken together our annual programme is varied, rich, and intellectually challenging.

The Duke of Edinburgh believes that, as the College is hidden away within the Castle walls, it is particularly attractive to people in positions of leadership within government, industry, commerce and the churches as a venue for discreet discussions of mutual and national interest.

Our aim is to effect change for the better in our society by nurturing Wisdom through dialogue.

The values of the House are openness, honesty, trust and respect. People from all areas of society, holding diverse views, opinions and beliefs come here to debate freely. The art of Consultation seeks to nurture Wisdom and open up the possibility of a different and better world.

The Wisdom we seek to nurture affirms and encourages, questions and surprises. It searches out new possibilities and desires the best for all our people and our planet. It is forward-looking and free from contemporary idols. It fosters personal and community transformation. The practical result of such Wisdom is trust, justice, equality and peace.

It is Wisdom based on knowledge, understanding, good judgement and far-sighted decision-making. It is Wisdom for our time.



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For more information about  
Consultations at St George's House  
visit [www.stgeorghouse.org](http://www.stgeorghouse.org)



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