

Qualitative Research Report prepared by
Futures 4 Forces
for Forces in Mind Trust

UK employers' perceptions on the
employment and employability of
ex-Service personnel

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There was an excellent advert showing all the skills needed for the Territorial Army as part of its recruitment campaign. There should be a similar campaign showing the skills of the regular military which are so valuable and transferable to the workplace. This would build greater awareness and potentially help change perceptions.

(Larger organisation, mining)

Employers have many ideas on how to improve the employment prospects of Service leavers, and appreciate the opportunity of having them heard

Introduction

By Ray Lock CBE, Chief Executive Forces in Mind Trust

Finding employment is one of the key ingredients of a Service person's (and their family's) successful transition into civilian life. As this report acknowledges, many transition successfully with only a minimum amount of support. Others though, for a variety of reasons, find transition harder. In a period of recent history when public support for the UK's Armed Forces has never been higher, the willingness of UK businesses to help veterans into employment is welcome, and in tune with society.

Which is why it can be frustrating to observe the gap between the wishes of employers to take on veterans, and their ability to do so effectively. This study was originally commissioned to identify employers' perceptions of ex-Service personnel; but its findings found considerable disquiet and misunderstanding at the processes whereby the MOD supports its people moving into civilian employment. To try to resolve some of these issues, Forces in Mind Trust conducted a number of senior stakeholder interviews during 2014 and exposed some of the key findings from the research. As further versions of the report were developed, the formal process to re-let the Career Transition Partnership (CTP)^{1,2} got underway, and in order to avoid the report being mis-used for commercial purposes, for which it was never intended, final publication was postponed until the CTP successful bidder had been announced.

This work has not been entirely without impact already however, as extracts have been used to inform many other areas of work in the employment space. Lord Ashcroft's veterans' transition review team and Business in the Community both considered the report's findings in their respective work on the employment of veterans, and some of the underlying principles were considered by the MOD during the CTP re-let, and have most certainly been used to develop Forces in Mind Trust's own theory of change concept for successful transition.

The key findings can be found within the main report, including comments suggesting:

- Employment sectors, industry and business are changing rapidly, presenting new opportunities as well as challenges.
- Stereotypes persist in perception, and are sometimes fulfilled in reality, not always negatively. For example, ex-Service females working in traditionally man-dominated industries is one clear area of potential.
- Pathways for employers to reach potential employees are not clear to all, and effective interaction with the MOD's infrastructure is beyond some.

¹ The Career Transition Partnership is a partnering agreement between the Ministry of Defence and Right Management Ltd. CTP provides resettlement services for those leaving the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. It also operates as an intermediary service for employers wishing to hire Service leavers.

² Interviewees used the terms MOD, the military and CTP interchangeably, often without explaining the exact areas or departments to which they were referring.

and a couple of specific suggestions:

- CV writing should be improved.
- Mentoring should be developed.

In such a limited qualitative study, it is easy to refute the findings as atypical; but great care has been taken to avoid stating unfounded generalizations. We would therefore urge all readers, be they employers, Service leavers or the MOD itself, to take note of the findings, and to take decisive action to improve the chances of our ex-Service personnel and their families undergoing a successful transition into civilian life.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Lock". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'R' and 'L'.

17th August 2015

1. Research objectives and methods

Each year, around 20,000 Service personnel are planned to leave the Armed Forces, and recent manpower reductions will cause a short-term rise in this figure. Given the size of these numbers, as well as changes in the UK (and world) economies, it is vital that the transition process from the Armed Forces into civilian life is in tune with current labour market needs and trends.

A responsive transition process requires knowledge of employers' recruitment needs and their attitudes to recruiting Service leavers. The MOD works hard to maintain knowledge on what employers understand of the Service leaver community.³ However, Futures 4 Forces believes that this independent, senior manager-targeted qualitative study, provides additional and useful insights that can enhance the transition process and so support FiMT's aim to provide an evidence base that will influence and underpin policy making and service delivery in order to enable ex-Service personnel and their families to lead successful civilian lives.

The objectives of the study were:

- To establish how knowledgeable employers are about the transition process and employing Service leavers.
- To identify differences in attitude towards Service leavers by sector and company size.
- To explore the experience of those employing Service leavers and identify what would encourage them to employ more.
- To find out why some employers do not employ Service leavers.
- To establish the level of assistance and communication needed by employers who have not previously considered employing Service leavers.
- To identify how employers perceive the transition process. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the process?

The study comprised interviews with senior HR personnel or senior managers of 51 organisations throughout the UK. For the purposes of this study, the organisations were grouped into those with >2000 employees (n=25) and those with <1000 employees (n=26). As these do not fit the UK's definition of 'large' and 'SME', where 250 employees marks the boundary, the terms 'larger' and 'smaller' organization are used. Where 'large' and 'SME' do feature, these terms relate to research conducted outside the qualitative interviews for this study. The organisations consulted represented a range of sectors, including oil and gas, security, education, retail and telecoms.⁴ Of the interviews conducted, 25 were face to face and 26 were telephone interviews. Under the terms of the interviews, it was agreed that individual organizations would not be identified in the final report.

The original qualitative research was carried out by Tom Fitzherbert, Charlotte Horn and Mike Donovan of Stimulating World between April and July 2013, and was updated via a desk-level review in August 2014. This final version has been further developed to reflect changes over the last 12 months, during which time earlier versions were used to inform other studies. This publication therefore marks the final version, which has undergone considerable editing since Futures 4 Forces original draft in late 2013.

³ The Manpower Employment Overview Survey is an annual telephone-based survey of over 2000 UK employers.

⁴ See Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown.

2. The UK jobs market

External perspectives

The state of the UK economy and the jobs market persistently made the headlines throughout 2013. The following quotes summarise the challenges faced by jobseekers, whether Service leavers or not.

The UK jobs market continues to astound. We are in the middle of both a jobs boom and a pay slump as jobseekers struggle to gain or retain employment in a stagnant economy by pricing themselves into work. This is unlike anything seen in this country since the Second World War, with the economy using more and more people at falling real rates of pay to produce a static level of output.

Dr John Philpott, Director, The Jobs Economist⁵

Not all opinions voiced were so pessimistic.

The strength of the UK labour market continues to defy the doom-mongers. Employer confidence remains strong and the outlook for 2013 is generally very positive, although there are still legitimate reasons to worry about persistent levels of youth unemployment. The private sector continues to more than compensate for public sector job losses and in some high demand areas starting salaries are inflating as businesses find themselves in a race for talent. When skills shortages emerge, employers need to be flexible. Business demand for candidates in highly skilled areas like engineering, IT and management is outstripping the UK's current supply of qualified and experienced candidates. Bosses need to think about whether they could do just as well by taking on someone who shows potential if they can't find candidates with the years of experience they initially feel are necessary for a role.

Tom Hadley, Director of Policy and Professional Service, Recruitment and Employment Confederation⁶

It is clear that the UK economy continues to improve.

After a period of generally disappointing growth in 2011 and 2012, the UK economy showed clear signs of recovery during 2013 and we expect this to continue in 2014-15. All major industry sectors and regions are now showing positive growth trends.

PwC Report on the UK Economy in July 2014⁷

However, Service leavers will still be entering a highly competitive jobs market where 'living standards' remains a political issue as wage increases appear to lag behind 'cost of living' measures.⁸

⁵ *The Independent*, 21 February 2013.

⁶ Online statement from the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

⁷ <http://www.pwc.co.uk/the-economy/publications/uk-economic-outlook/> accessed 19 August 2014.

⁸ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/exclusive-ed-miliband-to-the-rescue-of-the-middle-classes-as-labour-leader-says-costofliving-crisis-will-be-at-heart-of-election-manifesto-9242442.html> accessed 19 August 2014.

An employers' perspective

The employers interviewed for this study were asked to describe the employment market in 2013. Their opinions provide useful insight into the challenges and opportunities facing Service leavers who are seeking civilian work and pointers for ways that the transition process can be refined to better reflect employment trends in different sectors.

- The economic climate has led to people becoming increasingly risk averse about changing jobs. In SMEs, turnover in management is typically 3–5%, for the lower skills it is 20–30%.
- The emerging markets of Africa, China and India provide significant opportunities for many sectors, with several looking to double their business over the next 5 years within those markets. It must be accepted that the traditional strategy of recruiting from within a growth sector is no longer adequate. Businesses undergoing major expansion will need to look outside their sectors for new skills.
- Northern Ireland has seen a shift from employment in the public to the private sector. There is a very high level of applications for each job.
- The UK security sector has become more competitive, with a huge number of applications registered on the major players' employment sites.
- The public sector is constrained by budget cuts, which impacts on recruitment. It values the skills of the military and would like to target Service leavers in the future as recruitment picks up.
- In the UK various sectors are growing, or have skill shortages, and are looking to Service leavers to fill the gap. These sectors include communications, IT, oil and gas, retail and its supply chain. This reinforces the points made by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.
- The financial services market is very volatile and the sector can expect further regulation. Whereas in the past Service leavers were seen as excellent candidates to sell financial services, this sector is risk averse and candidates require specific qualifications.

3. Employers' recruitment strategies and methods

During the interviews employers were asked to explain the recruitment strategies and methods they use and to state which are the most successful for them.

Strategies

Some of the organisations that participated in our study have a clear strategy for recruiting Service leavers as well as an extensive programme for injured personnel. One example of this was a major UK bank. Its resettlement programme was set up in 2010 in partnership with the MOD and several Service charities. The programme assists wounded, injured or sick (WIS) Service personnel transitioning into civilian employment through, for example, course funding, financial education, CV writing and interview workshops, work experience placements and mentoring in the workplace. The bank actively looks to employ former Service personnel and is supportive of employees who are in the Reserve Forces.

Methods

This is not a comprehensive list, but covers those aspects that employers felt were most relevant to the study.

Social media

LinkedIn is becoming an increasingly popular recruitment method for employers looking to fill middle and senior management roles and candidates seeking such positions. Employers recognised that they need to learn more about the opportunities that LinkedIn presents as a recruitment tool, and some larger organisations are encouraging HR personnel to become 'LinkedIn' experts.

Employers generally lacked understanding of how Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels can be used to recruit candidates. However, they recognised that these Internet-based applications will have a major influence on recruitment techniques in the future, particularly in relation to attracting 18–35 year olds, and so are looking at ways of integrating them into their current practices.

LinkedIn is increasing in importance for us. Social media is now a driving force and LinkedIn is becoming our primary method [of recruitment]. We have an established, proficient in-house team that understands how to maximise LinkedIn.

(Large organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

We shall beef up our on-line presence and invest in social media; we see these as the best routes – no print.

(SME, manufacturing)

LinkedIn has had mixed results to date and we need to learn more about it.

(Large organisation, telecoms)

LinkedIn serves as a resource for communities and market information, not just recruitment. Service leavers need to be there.

(Large organisation, mining)

How many military personnel facing discharge have a brilliant, comprehensive, transferable profile on LinkedIn? If you're not in that market, you're missing a huge opportunity.

(Large organisation, mining)

We just started to use social media – not sure yet, but the US has had good results.

(Large organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

Agencies/headhunters

Larger organisations still employed agencies to fill senior roles, but this method of recruitment is falling out of favour due to cost. Smaller organizations rarely used agencies. The main advantages of using an agency are CV sifting, candidate screening, initial interviewing and presenting a shortlist of suitable candidates, thereby saving the organisation a great deal of time.

Media/advertising

Organisations used the regional press to advertise lower skilled/ranking roles and if they wanted to recruit from their local area. Larger and international organisations tended to use the national press to advertise very senior roles and jobs which require high-level skills that few people possess.

Local radio remains an effective source for accessing a large audience and building awareness of the brand. We recently recruited a project manager from an advert on the radio. (Large organisation, pharmaceuticals)

Jobcentre Plus

For smaller organizations, job centres are a source of candidates seeking entry level/lower skilled roles in the locality. Larger organisations use job centres to recruit manual workers.

Some of our best results are from recruitment fairs.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

We make a heavy investment each year into the online graduate programmes with the recruitment costs being around £5,000 per head per recruit. They are a vital source of future middle and senior management for this business.

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

I develop relationships with the individuals with talent who I think are great but I don't have a place for at that time. I therefore have a list of preferred candidates for when opportunities arise.

(Larger organisation, mining)

Recruitment fairs

Smaller organizations viewed recruitment fairs as time consuming and costly, but could see the value for larger organisations. Larger organisations didn't mention recruitment fairs as a major method of recruitment, apart from the oil and gas industry, which did use them regularly.

Apprenticeships, placements and graduate trainee programmes

Smaller organizations have reduced opportunities for apprenticeships and placements in the current economic climate, but recognise the benefits. Larger organisations are looking to expand their apprenticeships and placements, which they see as reducing recruitment risk and building the workforce for the future. Larger organisations in growth industries were found to be investing in graduate trainee programmes.

Word of mouth and networking

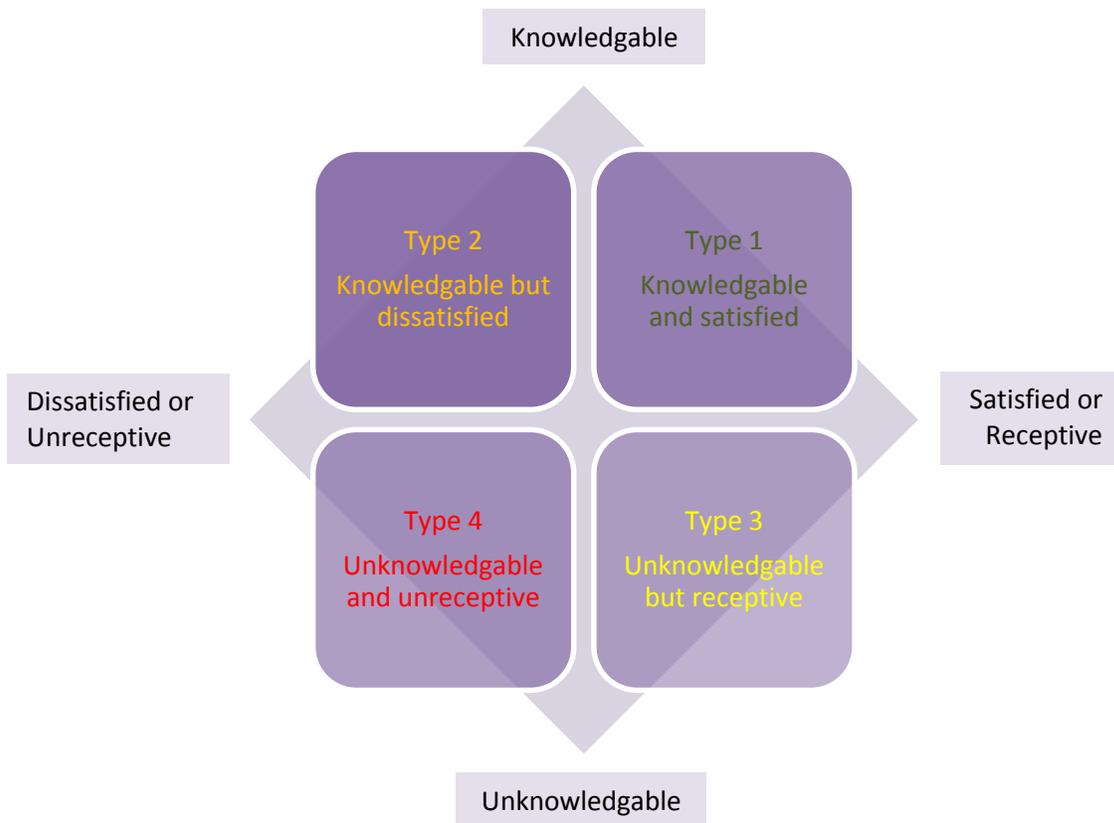
Personal recommendations and word of mouth are popular means of recruiting candidates for smaller organizations. The ex-military network remains a preferred informal method for Service leavers, particularly for approaching companies with specialist teams run by former Service personnel. This can conflict with HR procedures in larger organisations that have standardised recruitment and formal application processes.

Company databases

Smaller organizations rely on an established database of workers to fulfil short-term/contract roles. Larger organisations have comprehensive, web-based recruitment management systems which store thousands of applications, allowing them to select appropriate candidates using advanced search technologies.

4. Employer types

Employers' responses to the question 'Do you hire/target ex-Service personnel?' led researchers to categorize four types of employer, represented diagrammatically below. This model would be useful to employers with strategic aspirations to migrate into Type 1, and as a benchmark against which an organization might judge its performance in support of the Corporate Covenant, and how it could be improved. It contains concepts relevant to employers, Service leavers and the MOD.



<p>Type 2 – Knowledgeable but dissatisfied</p> <p>Employers in this category are knowledgeable but dissatisfied with the transition process and training for Service leavers. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are often very vocal and critical; however, some (those with a military background) could also be strong advocates of Service leavers, wanting better preparation for them and believing the transition process should be substantially improved • understand the skill sets of Service leavers • have limited relationships with the MOD and other agencies specialising in the recruitment of Service leavers <p>Type 2 employers were mainly senior management, some with direct involvement in the recruitment of Service leavers and some not.</p>	<p>Type 1 – Knowledgeable and satisfied</p> <p>These employers have a good track record of employing Service leavers. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the skill sets of Service leavers • have a good, constructive relationship with the MOD and other agencies specialising in the recruitment of Service leavers • are satisfied with the job readiness of Service leavers • have recruited Service leavers and are satisfied with their performance • would hire Service leavers again. <p>Type 1 employers were mainly senior management directly involved in the recruitment of Service leavers. They clearly understood the skill sets of the military and how these were transferable to their business.</p>
<p>Type 4 – Unknowledgeable and unreceptive</p> <p>These employers assume that Service leavers will not have the necessary skills or fit in with the culture of their organisation. They would not actively discriminate against Service leavers but would likely give more credence to civilian applicants (consciously or subconsciously).</p> <p><i>They [Service leavers] have had no experience of working in the private sector, so I imagine it would be a big leap for them. They are a risk my business cannot afford in this climate.</i> (Smaller organization, manufacturing)</p> <p>There were more smaller organizations represented in this segment and in industries that do not have a track record of employing Service leavers.</p>	<p>Type 3 – Unknowledgeable but receptive</p> <p>Type 3 employers are unknowledgeable about but receptive to employing Service leavers. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • do not fully understand the skill sets of Service leavers • do not have relationships with the MOD and other agencies specialising in the recruitment of Service leavers • are unlikely to make the effort to go out of their way to find out more about recruiting Service leavers. <p><i>It is something I have never really thought about before.</i> (Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)</p> <p><i>They [Service leavers] would get a fair hearing along with any other applicant.</i> (Larger organisation, call centre)</p> <p>Type 3 employers were an equal mix of senior and middle management.</p>

5. Findings

5.1 Introduction

With such a relatively small sample size (n=51) for this study, it is important not to inflate the significance of individual comments, and to reiterate that use of the term 'employers' invariably also implies 'that were interviewed'. Nonetheless, the very nature of those who were interviewed, namely senior management, gives their views more credence than routine desktop surveys. In presenting these findings, great care has been taken to provide considered and credible commentary, giving colour (if no greater substance) by the use of individual remarks in call-out boxes.

The layout of this section follows the familiar path of commencing with an environmental analysis, followed by what employers perceive of Service leavers. The mechanics of the transition process are then commented upon, and the section concludes with a few thoughts on the Service leaver in employment.

5.2 The employment environment

5.2.1 Job opportunities in different sectors

Sectors traditionally associated with employing Service leavers

Security is one of the sectors on which Service leavers have traditionally relied for employment (others not interviewed here might include construction) and so representatives of several large security businesses and high-risk security services were interviewed for the study: some had military backgrounds themselves.

These employers were very supportive of the idea of employing Service leavers, but they acknowledged that adverse market pressures and changing skill requirements are leading to a decline in recruitment. In high-risk guarding and security, employers said they had reduced their workforce by half and that many of the remaining employees are on reduced rates of pay. Employers also identified loss of contracts as a factor contributing to a reduced workforce. For instance, while there has been an increase in demand for events security, check and search roles are being undertaken by the temporary employment market – often students on zero-hours contracts.

During the interviews with employers, job opportunities within several sectors emerged, despite the relatively fragile economic climate in the UK.

- Marine protection is always looking for recruits. They have large numbers of applications and operate their own resource management database.
- Recruits are also wanted in the emerging high-risk security markets in the Sahara and in sub-Saharan Africa.

The MOD should take advantage of this opportunity with medically trained Service leavers, as the outsourced medical service sector is emerging and growing dramatically.

(Larger organisation, private medical services)

- Within the health sector, private business sees a growing need for personnel due to the policy of outsourcing, albeit with fewer opportunities therefore in the public sector.

Sectors not traditionally associated with employing Service leavers

Representatives of companies in sectors not traditionally associated with employing Service leavers were also interviewed during the study. Some of these sectors (eg retail and fast-moving consumer goods) have the potential for growth in new markets, yet employing Service leavers is often not a priority.

The supply chain requires the experience and competency available within the military – IT, quality management, logistics, etc

(Larger organisation, retail)

Military personnel in the middle to senior ranks provide far greater skill and background in leadership strategy than their civilian equivalent.

(Larger organisation, retail)

Retail has some experience of working with Service leavers but not across all business functions. The rapid growth in on-line retail could be a significant and exciting opportunity for Service leavers. Those employers in retail who were more knowledgeable about Service leavers (and who often had military backgrounds) understood the value they could bring to their business.

However, these employers admitted that they often left employment matters to HR, who probably had no real knowledge of Service leavers and ‘when push came to shove’ were likely to choose candidates from backgrounds with which they were more familiar.

Our junior HR staff do not have the knowledge or openness. They would probably choose a candidate who had specific retail experience over an inexperienced Service leaver.

(Larger organisation, retail)

I know how valuable Service leavers are because of my time in the Services, but why should anyone who has not served know this? I have invested time to encourage HR to look at and interview Service personnel for roles they would be ideally suited for.

(Larger organisation, logistics)

We are looking for drivers through to warehouse managers, but HR told me it was too much of a gamble to take on ex-military as they had very different backgrounds. I haven't really got the time to oversee HR and what they get up to but of course they are wrong in this matter.

(Larger organisation, logistics)

Traditionally organisations in the fast-moving consumer goods sector have recruited only from within the sector. However, new opportunities in markets such as China, India and Africa mean that they will now need to spread their net wider in order to recruit staff. Most employers interviewed admitted that they had never thought about Service leavers as being the answer to their recruitment needs. They struggled to match the skills they believed were necessary for military life to those needed in their organisations.

They [Service leavers] might have what we are looking for but, to be honest, it seems a bit remote. They would need to prove to us they have what it takes.

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

We need consumer marketing specialists or commercial sales operators, or an accountant – I'm not going to find that in the military, am I?

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

There is an inherent benefit for managers who understand our market landscape so they are able to move fast in the market. It's much easier to send someone to a new emerging market who already understands the process and the sector, and we can bring someone else in to their position in the UK to backfill.

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

It would be interesting to look at the competency set at each rank in the military against my needs. I think we could bet that there would be an 80% overlap. You have now got me thinking.

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

As well as concerns about Service leavers' skills not being what fast-moving consumer goods employers require, there was also concern that they could lack flexibility and could not fit into an organisation's culture (see 5.3.1 on stereotyping).

The North Sea oil fields were seen to be a dying area; however, with new technologies and the price of oil (in 2013) this is a significant growth area once again.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

The concern is that a generation of highly experienced geoscientists and engineers is reaching retirement age with limited succession planning. This could leave critically large gaps in knowledge and expertise in our sector and at very short notice.

(Larger oil and gas sector body)

I recognise that if we are going to maintain and grow our position in this sector, we will need to bring in new talent. I am very attracted to the military because they are keen to learn, self-motivated, disciplined and self-starters.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

Relevant interviewees reported renewed demand for skilled labour in the oil and gas industry. The sector potentially offers excellent opportunities as a second career for Service leavers, with the forecast life cycle of North Sea oil extending to the next 40 to 50 years.

There is also a major advantage in that the average offshore management and technical team member is over 55 years of age and nearing retirement.

The oil and gas industry needs a variety of skilled engineers, which could potentially be filled by Service leavers. Unlike in some of the other industries studied in this research, HR wants to employ large numbers of Service leavers – but senior management needs convincing that the training costs involved will be recouped.

There is a great fight for resources in order to maximise the opportunity within the sector. This provides an excellent opportunity for those Service leavers with the relevant technical skills to have a highly productive second career in this sector.

(Larger oil and gas sector body)

Key points

The industries on which Service leavers have traditionally relied to find employment are changing and Service leavers will need to demonstrate more than ever that they have the right skill sets.

Service leavers will also need to prove themselves to industries that have ambitious growth plans but no real understanding of military life or the associated skill sets. While these industries are not opposed to recruiting Service leavers, they need convincing that Service leavers can make a real contribution to business success.

In the transition, Service leavers need to understand that they should have realistic expectations and will probably have to take two steps back in order to take three forward.

(Larger organisation, logistics)

5.2.2 Skill shortages in parts of the UK

Although the employment market in 2013 was characterised by many candidates chasing fewer jobs, and that remains the case in 2014, in some sectors, in some parts of the UK, employers are actively competing to hire the best skilled and unskilled employees. The engineering, IT and management sectors report a severe shortage of qualified employees. This shortage results in ‘hot spots’ – parts of the UK that have a pressing need for people with the right skills and qualifications.

Hot spots apparent in the UK in 2013 were Aberdeen (oil and gas, and telecoms), South-West England (energy) and Northern Ireland (pharmaceuticals). NHS employers interviewed as part of this study also identified throughout the UK a shortage of people able to take on specialist roles.

- PwC predicts that Aberdeen has 15,000 job opportunities in the oil and gas sector (Harris, 2013) confirmed by the employers interviewed and operating in this sector.
- The telecoms and other sectors are looking for engineers and people with related skill sets. Employers interviewed from these sectors stated that they have to work harder to attract candidates in parts of the UK where the oil and gas sector operates.
- A major pharmaceutical company in Northern Ireland told our researchers that it had exhausted the local employment market for specialist staff and needed to extend its reach to recruit from outside the province.
- NHS employers identified opportunities available in specialist nursing, medicine and other specialist roles.

- Employers in South-West England believe that this part of the UK is experiencing a period of growth. With support from a Local Enterprise Partnership, new employers are being attracted to Bristol and the surrounding area. The new power station at Hinkley Point will create 25,000 jobs, with an estimated 900 people needed to run the site.

We're in an enterprise zone which is attracting a lot of employers around here in Bristol and the South West – it's a boom area right now.
(Smaller organization, port authority)

There are many utility companies fighting for the same pool of people. Those with these [electrical/engineering] skills will be very marketable until 2020 and possibly over the next 10 years. I am going to need 3-500 additional specialist electricians (the majority until the end of 2020 and for fault analysis and emergency work).

(Smaller organization, energy)

- The government's aim is for all homes and small businesses to have smart meters by 2020. The energy sector will need qualified electricians/engineers to install and roll out the new programme, which allows remote collection of consumption data and will require lesser qualified staff to maintain it going forward.

Key points

There are opportunities for Service leavers if they are prepared to target 'hot spots' within the UK, where competition for both skilled and unskilled employees is high, and this should influence the decision of Service leavers and their families about where they will live. Unfortunately, not all of the areas of the UK identified as hot spots (as employers admit themselves) are necessarily attractive, nor do they coincide with where Service leavers naturally return to after Service, often areas from which they were originally recruited.

Employers' suggestions and observations included:

- Can more be done by the MOD to identify 'hot spots' and to ensure that all employers are made aware of Service leavers and the transition process? Some employers work extensively with the MOD; others report that they have never been contacted.
- Involve Service leavers' partners in the transition process to help with relocation issues.

Service leavers need to be encouraged to come up and visit with their partners; they will see what a great quality of life there is here. We need the jobs and the location promoted during transition by MOD.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

5.2.3 Public support for the military

Many of the employers interviewed recognised that the public is currently very supportive of the military. If they were not employing Service leavers at the moment (and had perhaps never thought about doing so before the research) there was a feeling that they should at least consider it. But the recruitment of Service leavers is by no means a priority, with larger organisations pointing out that they wouldn't recruit ex-Service personnel for corporate social responsibility reasons alone.

The positive mood towards the military can be in part attributed to the military charities that during the last few years have championed the cause of wounded, injured or sick Service leavers and raised awareness of the attributes, skills and value of all military personnel. One employer likened the public's sympathetic support of the military to a brand life cycle. So, although the mood is positive now, it could be expected to become less so over time. Other employers also worried that support for the military could wane, and therefore make it more difficult for Service leavers to find work. When trying to persuade colleagues who are unknowledgeable about military life to employ Service leavers, some employers had used the public's positive attitudes towards the military as a way of helping them to win the argument.

Businesses don't see recruitment of ex-military as part of their social responsibility but as an opportunity to recruit really valuable skilled personnel and to reduce their recruitment risk. Having Service leavers at the top of an employer's agenda has never been so high. There is factual evidence that donations to the military charities have fallen and the national mood may be waning. We have to take action now. This unique window of opportunity may be closing.

(Larger organisation, financial services)

We all like the idea of employing Service leavers at the moment. There is a real patriotic mood, so it is important to make the best of it and get employers across the UK on-side, otherwise it could all be too late.

(Larger organisation, retail)

A great deal of work is needed to join up all that is going on in the employment of both able-bodied as well as injured Service leavers, and we have limited time to ride the wave of support. Therefore, we need to act now to have the greatest impact on getting Service leavers employed.

(Larger organisation, financial services)

The time is right to get Service leavers employed. They have a wide range of valued skills, with a culture of commitment and delivery. With the national mood as it is to Service personnel, every effort should be made to get this excellent resource employed whilst the window remains open.

(Larger organisation, retail)

Key points

The supportive national mood is perceived by some employers who have a good track record of employing Service leavers, to be in danger of waning. In their opinion, urgent action needs to be taken to coordinate initiatives and capitalise on the goodwill in employers' minds, before it becomes more difficult to do so.

5.3 Employers' perspectives of the Service leaver

5.3.1 Stereotyping

Among employers who have a poor track record of employing Service leavers there can be an instinctive stereotype of the military as 'men barking orders with guns in war zones' possessing limited skill sets and a culture of giving and following orders. Although most employers can get beyond this stereotypical imagery, the concern is that candidates with military backgrounds will always be at a disadvantage when compared with their civilian counterparts, who are seen as being a better fit with company culture.

Representatives of smaller organizations were particularly vocal about the possible drawbacks of employing Service leavers. While they would like to be seen to support them, the overriding feeling is that there isn't room for any 'passengers' in a small business. Employers in industries experiencing a period of growth, such as retail, and oil and gas, also struggle to see how Service leavers' skill sets and attitudes could be relevant to their business.

The sometimes extraordinary comments opposite are reproduced *verbatim*. They might not necessarily indicate a majority view, or reflect upon a typical Service leaver; but it would be unwise to assume that such experiences or perceptions are not spread fairly widely across employers.

My warehouse manager was given 6 months to sort out the operation and he still comes to me 7 months on asking for orders; he salutes me every morning and calls me sir ... we are a lean, relaxed set up, I just want him to take the reins. I can't do his thinking for him.

(Smaller organization, manufacturing)

My personal experience is that ex-Servicemen seem to find it quite difficult if they have a woman above them, they seem to find it difficult to take orders from them. They are used to being in war zones, I suppose. I've had to get the company director (who is male) to get the ex-Serviceman to do something ... although it is very individual.

(Smaller organization, facilities management)

Over the years the charity has taken on a number of excellent Service personnel. Those who have had long service and have got a good pension have been the traditional applicants for middle management within the charity. Long-serving officers are seen to be institutionalised and find it very difficult to break down their way of thinking. The charity is looking for a great deal of flexibility and initiative, but often these individuals have a degree of arrogance and inability to adapt to the everyday conditions of a busy and changing business environment. This builds a view of the military within the charity of a lack of flexibility.

(Larger organisation, non-for-profit)

We need to keep our staff happy and the last thing they need is someone from outside who comes in and barks orders at them.

(Larger organisation, fast-moving consumer goods)

Key points

While many employers appreciate the skill sets of Service leavers, the stereotypical image of the Armed Forces can be a barrier to recruitment for those with little or no knowledge of the military. Employers believe that the MOD itself has a major role to play in raising awareness of Service leavers' experience and skills and how they can be transferred to the workplace.

Some employers who had undergone the transition from military to civilian life themselves said that when they first tried to get employment they had to work hard in their interviews to 'educate' their prospective employers about their experience and transferable skills. Once they had been accepted into the company they then did their best to educate HR and others who might make decisions about hiring Service leavers.

Some employers recognised that one way of encouraging employers to look beyond the stereotypes of the Armed Forces is to focus on the role of female Service leavers and the contribution they can make to the workplace (see section 5.3.2).

5.3.2 Opportunities for female Service leavers

Some large companies in traditionally male-dominated industries are becoming conscious of the need to 'balance' their workforces and employ more women. This approach is felt to have many advantages in terms of improving company culture and better reflecting today's society. Some employers who are knowledgeable about military life recognise that female Service leavers would be ideal in helping them to balance their heavily male workforces since they have proved they can succeed in male environments.

There is a heavy gender imbalance, with male domination of over 90% within the business and this is even higher offshore. We need to change this and take the examples of the military of hiring and developing female talent within the business. This will take a long time.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

We need to recruit more women to reflect our customer base and balance our team.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

I am looking to recruit two women; if you have a team with the same background/gender, this limits them. Bringing in women provides a different perspective and I believe the team operates better. Do female Service leavers know how valuable they are to companies like mine?

(Larger organisation, mining)

Women are now infield where they have to hold their own in difficult situations and in a male-dominated environment – the ones I have interviewed are really good, they need support to maximise their value when coming into the business.

(Larger organisation, healthcare)

Some employers believe that female Service leavers would not be intimidated by working in a male-dominated organisation. One employer from the mining industry said his sector had overlooked women in the past, probably because they (the employers) worried subconsciously that women would find working in a male culture too difficult.

Employers consider a balanced workforce to be an important factor in creating a better, more efficient and productive workplace. Two interviewees who had left the military in the past 5 years and who had experienced the skill sets and achievements of successful women in the military were the most vocal in their support for this group. Both were actively looking to recruit female Service leavers to enhance their teams.

Key points

Female Service leavers can seem especially impressive to employers as they have proved they can work and succeed in traditionally male-dominated environments. Even though some employers think it could take a while to achieve a truly balanced workforce, they recognise that female Service leavers could be invaluable for external as well as internal reasons.

Employers' observations and suggestions included:

- *Encourage female Service leavers to target more male-dominated industries, stressing their ability to cope in them.*
- *The MOD needs to promote female Service leavers' ability to balance workforces.*
- *Promote female Service leavers, to challenge the stereotype some employers have about the military.*

5.3.3 Perception of rank

The chief executive of one high-risk security business said that their organisation had moved away from employing Service leavers in areas of commercial management, favouring candidates with direct commercial experience and relevant qualifications instead. However, when the organisation did employ Service leavers, they were more likely to come from the senior middle ranks because of a perception that these Service leavers have core business skills, such as project management.

While the middle ranks were seen as being open to working flexibly and fitting in with civilian life, this was not felt to be the case with very senior ranks. Employers judged high-ranking Service leavers to be too 'institutionalised' and have unrealistic salary expectations.



There is a lack of commercial awareness in their [senior ranks'] ability to make assumptions and 'what ifs'. We, as an organisation, are ruthless commercially; margins are key. We had a senior officer lose us millions because he had not understood margins on a major contract.

(Larger organisation, security)

5.4 Mechanics of transition to civilian employment

5.4.1 The part played by MOD

The Transition Mapping Study⁹ drew a necessary distinction between ‘transition’ (the period of reintegration into civilian life from the Armed Forces) and ‘resettlement’ (the formal processes and procedures by which transition is managed, and the formal support provided to Service leavers during transition). This section of the report focuses almost exclusively on resettlement, and the MOD’s role in it.

5.4.1.1 Policy

The MOD’s resettlement policy is stated clearly in Joint Services Publication 534, The Tri-Service Resettlement Manual.¹⁰

0101. Tri-Service Resettlement Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- a. To provide all Armed Forces personnel with access to timely and accurate resettlement information and advice.
- b. To provide Service leavers (SL) with access to resettlement provision based on best practice, which meets individual needs.
- c. To provide resettlement assistance on a graduated basis, both in terms of provision and time available, according to length of service.
- d. To provide contracted resettlement services, which include advice, workshops, training and job finding, which are flexible, responsive and effective so that they meet the individual needs of Service personnel, both in terms of accessibility and content. Where these meet the appropriate training outcomes, these should be considered as courses of first choice.
- e. To provide resettlement assistance to all SL.

At the time of this study, the contracted resettlement services at Paragraph 0101d were provided by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), a partnering agreement between the MOD and Right Management Ltd.¹¹ A new agreement will come into force in October 2015, and although CTP will continue, it should be noted that the terms of the new contract might be significantly different to those on which this research is based. Many employers interviewed expressed views on how the MOD achieved its policy goals. Some were clear in distinguishing for example between MOD as a policy-setting strategic

⁹ The Futures Company (2013), The Transition Mapping Study. Available at http://www.fim-trust.org/images/PDFs/FIMT_report_FINAL.pdf

¹⁰ MOD (March 2014), JSP 534. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16863/20061018JSP534Issue4U.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.ctp.org.uk/about-us/the-ctp> accessed 25 August 2014.

headquarters, and MOD as a partner in the operational delivery of resettlement services through the CTP. Others, however, conflated the differing roles of the MOD, as well as those of the three single Services and indeed those of the individual, every Serviceman and woman being a member of the MOD in the broadest sense. To avoid individual (and potentially misleading) experiences affecting the overall findings of this report, we have used 'MOD' to describe all these elements, from individual to Department to Partnership.

Before providing employers' views, it is worth offering the justification for publicly funding resettlement services, which is set into context again by JSP 534.

0107. Resettlement provides added value to the Services, particularly as a retention tool, and should be seen as representing the final stage of in-Service through-life learning and personal development. It is essential that the chain of command recognises it as an activity which is an integral part of the Service career, and that SL are granted sufficient time and funds, within a suitably early timeframe, in order to pursue resettlement fully in accordance with entitlement.

0108. Effective and high profile resettlement support, underpinned by the chain of command, should alleviate SL fears concerning post-discharge employment. Consequently, it should discourage early notice to leave the Armed Forces, which might otherwise be submitted, for instance, to gain additional qualifications or for fear of becoming "too old" to start a second career. Resettlement should be viewed as a retention and recruitment positive tool and everything possible done, at unit level, to publicise the resettlement services available and to enable individual SL to derive the maximum benefit from services to which they are entitled.

5.4.1.2 Case studies

Two large telecoms employers we interviewed had had very different experiences of working with the MOD regarding training and recruiting Service leavers. Why was this, and what are the lessons to be learnt for other employers and the MOD? A case study approach was incidentally recommended by one interviewee.

Case A - a large telecoms company has an ongoing programme which has been developed over 2 years with heavy investment from the business. The company admits to having been very demanding of the MOD, but acknowledges that being proactive has been more than worthwhile because the result has been excellent. It has successfully recruited 1500 ex-military engineers and has seen significant benefits.

Case B - another major employer in the telecoms industry was looking to recruit 3000 new employees in retail and customer service roles. However, this company believes it has not seen any significant support or investment by the MOD in the business. The

The MOD needs to support businesses through education and demonstrating great case histories. This would be especially helpful where middle management and junior HR staff do not understand the value of having Service leavers as employees.

head of HR and talent had wanted the MOD to invest time to support recruiting more Service leavers, but believed that this help had not been forthcoming.

Employer views – Case A

As a first step, we agreed with MOD the forecast for new recruits and set out a strategic delivery programme. A dedicated MOD/CTP account management team was set up to focus on this recruitment, with a pre-screening programme to ensure that only appropriate candidates were put through.

We have invested significant time in our internal and external communications programme and have been on many CTP and other speaking platforms, presenting our case to Service leavers as well as to a wider audience of employers.

More recently we have also offered Service leavers the unique opportunity to carry out a 3-month Civilian Work Attachment (CWA)¹ as part of a national Engineering Mobile Workforce. During the CWA we provide full training, following a standard company syllabus, and Service leavers gain the relevant certificates. Since October 2012 we have offered almost 450 Service leavers the opportunity to carry out a CWA. As part of this proposition, all individuals who complete the CWA are guaranteed an interview for a permanent role within the business and are provided with interview coaching. To date, a fantastic 92% of those who have carried out a CWA have subsequently attended an interview and have been offered employment.

Employer's views – Case B

There is a very low awareness in our business of the MOD and the potential skills Service leavers could offer us. There seems to be no account management from MOD, and they do not appear to understand our business. Service leavers would make great branch and customer managers. I think this is a phenomenal career opportunity. The problem is that these types of opportunities are not being promoted in the career counselling during the transition process. We would like to see significant improvements in the process, access points, commitment, knowledge and passion of the MOD, so we could work with them to bring Service leavers into this business.

5.4.1.3 Access to Service leavers

Many of the interviewees welcomed the idea of Service leavers approaching their company directly about employment opportunities, but it was clear that most would not go out of their way to make this happen. They believed that Service leavers and the government agencies representing them should be the proactive parties and be more knowledgeable about sectors' and companies' skill needs. Employers wished to make recruitment as easy as possible for Service leavers but the reality is that there are often good candidates with non-military backgrounds competing for the same jobs.

The research highlighted concerns among some employers who had experienced a lack of follow-up by the MOD with regard to finding out more about taking on Service leavers, or from the agencies first contacting them. This lack of follow-up could easily lead to cynicism and concerns that the government is simply 'ticking boxes' and is not fully committed to helping Service leavers make the transition into employment.

The military come to us when they have it on their agenda, or when pressure is put on them by government. They look at it from their side of the fence, rather than being customer driven.

(Larger organisation, security)

In contrast, some employers complained that there are too many charities, bodies and agencies contacting them about taking on Service leavers. The threat here is that employers might switch off to the various requests and messages they receive. Communication with employers needs to be clear and coordinated.

Employers in IT, engineering and project management recognised that military training in these areas is very strong. However, some believed that access to Service leavers with these skills can be more difficult than it should be.

Service leavers often post their CVs on-line while they are preparing to leave the Armed Forces, but employers who have a history of recruiting Service leavers want to be able to contact potential recruits before then, to advise them of the job opportunities in their company and put a marker down for when the transition finishes. It was suggested there should be a portal (operating within the Data Protection Act) that enables HR senior management to compare the skills possessed by Service leavers with the specific skills needed by their organisation.

I would be prepared to pay for this [a portal] and the business would need a champion to manage the portal effectively if it was put in place.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

All ex-military candidates' details should be made available online (within the Data Protection Act) so HR can carry out searches, which they could then forward to the relevant departments who are recruiting for the particular skills found in the search.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

Employers wanting this earlier contact felt that there was no effective mechanism for it to take place, and that Service leavers were too reliant on the MOD.

A recurring message from employers was a sense that the MOD needs to understand better the opportunities in the sectors experiencing growth, build relationships with employers and gather deeper knowledge. It would then be in a better position to promote opportunities.

The MOD should study the emerging sectors to identify their needs and the competencies required. They should then build a joint strategy plan with these emerging sectors and businesses that enables Service leavers the best opportunity of long-term employment.

(Larger organisation, retail)

5.4.1.4 Relationship between employers and MOD

Amongst this small (n=51) cohort of employer interviewees, there were misconceptions about the role of the MOD (and CTP), and some individual examples of excellence as well as frustration. What emerged was a desire for the MOD (currently through CTP) to act more in keeping with a fee-based recruitment agency with a deep knowledge in certain sectors. A similar proposition was put forward in The Transition Mapping Study.¹²

The employers who were aware of the MOD expressed some frustration about the organisation's inactivity in terms of helping them with their recruitment needs. The CTP was also felt to lack detailed sector knowledge.

The CTP has improved, but is too reliant on a small network; it doesn't talk to top-level people in blue chip companies (it has the credibility, but doesn't draw them in). It is the official MOD agency, but it stays in its comfort zone. It doesn't behave like a recruitment firm, much more a general advertising site.

(Smaller organization, specialist recruitment)

The CTP doesn't need to be 'one size fits all', it should be more regionally based and, within those regions, there must be an element of organisation and recruitment locally.

(Smaller organization, port authority)

We do not see CTP account managers. There's no sector expertise, no strategic thinking, or strategic engagement. They don't understand our business needs.

(Larger organisation, Telecoms)

Although large organisations have good awareness of the CTP, they claim that not enough contact is being initiated.

¹² The Futures Company, *op cit*, page 81 'A different transition model?'

Key points

Employers' observations and suggestions included the following comments:

The CTP needs to work at all levels and get the buy-in at the top level in blue chip companies. The CTP account managers need to demonstrate sector expertise, strategic thinking and long-term strategic engagement.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

The CTP needs to approach CEOs at major corporations and offer help in understanding their business, recruitment requirements, future needs and how to better access candidates and work with them to fulfil those needs.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

The CTP has to get the information in front of the candidates of what's available and where, early in their transition.

(Larger organisation, pharmaceuticals)

Set up a key account team that targets the top 100 companies and develops recruitment strategies to meet their needs.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

The CTP needs to act as a recruitment agency.

(Large organisation, telecoms; smaller organisation, specialist recruitment)

Greater investment is needed by the CTP in identifying the skill sets and the language in order to help our HR department identify value in the civilian world for Service leavers.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

The sector is driven by the oil and gas price. Senior management is loath to take on long-term cost as they have a culture of bringing in resources at short notice and then shedding them when the oil and gas prices fall. We need the help of the MOD to convince them [employers] that the investment in Service leavers will have the returns they want.

(Larger oil and gas sector body)

Follow-up

Some employers said that they had invested time in talking to the CTP and MOD (their terminology) about developing a joint strategy for employing Service leavers but had seen little or no follow-up. This had led to frustration and a loss of momentum.

Both my HR manager and I were knowledgeable and had a relationship with the CTP prior to coming to this business. We then established a relationship with them, which is good, and went to a presentation at Aldergrove. We were keen to know who was going to be there but never got any detailed information. We had an account manager who was then changed; there has been no handover, no contact and no visit since then and that was over 9 months ago.

(Larger organisation, pharmaceuticals)

One organisation in the oil and gas sector is in the process of investing \$11 billion in expansion projects. This sector as a whole is looking for a strategic relationship with and investment from the MOD to address the short, medium and long-term issues of resource and skill placements. The perception, however, is that the CTP only works at a local level.

We have had talks with the MoD and ministers – it makes sense to work strategically as well as operationally. We're in the middle of doing a skills matrix of essential, desirable and value-added skills and have agreement with military colleagues to give us their training programmes and materials to cross-map it.

(Larger oil and gas sector body)

The perceived lack of feedback from the MOD about its ideas for Service leavers is seen as evidence that the government department is worried it might be losing valuable skills and personnel earlier than it would like. The oil and gas sector believes, to the contrary, that Service leavers would remain in the military longer if they knew a second career was open to them in the oil and gas sector.

The short-term skill shortage and experience has led to the industry delaying multi-billion pound projects due to lack of skills and time to deliver. This is a government issue of lost opportunity in tax revenue and employment.

(Larger oil and gas sector body)

A senior manager in security also expressed frustration about trying to engage with the MOD and the military. Failure to build a working relationship with them led to cynicism.

The approach by the military feels shambolic; lots of noise which then fizzles out. The military come forward when it is on their agenda or the government puts pressure on them. They look at it from their side of the fence. There is a lot of early noise and no follow through or genuine commitment. The military are not market led.

(Larger organisation, security)

There was a major event run by the CTP where, as head of HR talent, I went up to them, made an introduction, left them three cards – and there was no follow-up. This compares with receiving between 20 and 30 calls a week from recruitment agencies. We need the CTP to follow up and work with us to overcome the major issue that middle and junior management are not knowledgeable or open to taking on Service leavers.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

Key points

Employers are very confused by the number and type of agencies claiming to act on behalf of Service leavers. This is perhaps not surprising given that there are seven different groups involved in the employment of Service leavers and injured personnel. These include military charities, specialist military recruitment agencies, recruitment agencies, the CTP, the MOD and a limited number of major employers supporting employment programmes. In addition, there are more than 2,000 military charities, many of which help ex-Service personnel into employment. There are also several charities specialising in supporting the injured into employment. In many cases, well-known businesses are ‘being bombarded’ by all those involved in Service leavers’ recruitment in a seemingly uncoordinated manner.

Even in businesses with experience in employing Service leavers there is confusion over who is responsible for what in relation to the employment of Service personnel and where the demarcation lies between the military charities, the MOD, the CTP, specialist military recruitment agencies and others.

The employment market for Service leavers is saturated with multiple agencies and government bodies, and it is now impossible for civilian employers to understand the best route to find candidates and from whom.

(Larger military charity)

I have to create a strategic plan for the employment of Service personnel and I don't know where to start or which body/organisation would be most helpful to go to.

(Larger organisation, facilities management)

I was looking to recruit someone to work in the field and thought that someone from the Services would be ideal. I tried extensively to be able to engage with the CTP, searched the internet and contacted a number of other groups, including a military charity, without success; so I eventually gave up due to the lack of response and information available.

(Smaller organisation, entrepreneur)

Key points

There should be a single document that sets out the responsibilities and contact details of the different organisations involved in the recruitment of Service leavers. This should be made available widely, so that there is a clear process for all companies wanting to recruit Service leavers through whatever route they choose.

5.4.2 The part played by the individual Service leaver

5.4.2.1 Networking

Employers identified networking as one of the most effective methods for finding the best recruits. They saw it as a very valuable tool for acquiring good candidates and as a way of reducing their recruitment risk. However, they felt that networking is a skill that requires thought and careful research to ensure maximum gain. Service leavers can easily 'burn through their network' and lose goodwill at an early stage by failing to prepare before connecting with their contacts.

As we recruit in a specialist area, most of my new recruits come from personal recommendations from existing employees who are ex-military.
(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

Some employers with military backgrounds said they were frequently approached by Service leavers directly and indirectly for advice and support. While they were very willing to help, they were often left frustrated.

Too many come through the door saying, "I can do anything, just give me a role and I will do it". They need to do more research and have a clear vision before they come to us. This should be covered in their transition process.

(Larger organisation, security)

I get calls almost daily from Service leavers and many don't know what they want to do and some haven't even thought through what they want from me.

(Larger organisation, retail)

They haven't done their research before approaching me, so lack a basic level of knowledge about the industry they are thinking of for their new career.

(Larger organisation, mining)

It is important to know either what direction you want to go in or what particular job you want before approaching your network. All too often Service leavers approach me without knowing this and it's frustrating and a waste of my time – this is particularly prevalent in some senior officers in their approach to their network.

(Larger organisation, security)

Employers' observations and suggestions to overcome poor networking included:

- Approach companies directly, but in a structured way, and construct a good argument. We don't want time-consuming speculative applications.
- Do the research ... talk to relatives, friends and family ... be proud and be selective [about who you talk to].
- Demonstrate interest/passion and past activity in the target charity sector ... understand it's not the best paid.

Some employers with military backgrounds (often from middle to senior management) said they were willing to be part of a network that could offer advice to and mentor Service leavers. They wondered why the MOD had not utilised their experience in this way.

5.4.2.2 Effective CVs

Some employers with recruiting responsibilities confessed that they know very little about the Armed Forces. They admitted to being confused by military jargon that sometimes litters Service leavers' CVs and to finding it difficult to match ex-military personnel's skill sets to their company's specific skill

There are mixed levels of CV preparation and presentation – some [CVs] are good and some [Service leavers] need guidance in selling themselves. Many don't realise what transferable skills they have. They feel pigeon-holed, but with additional skills, they are very transferable.

(Smaller organization, energy)

CVs are very good as the MOD has done the screening for us. We have to read beyond the CV as we are looking for engineering aptitude as much as anything else.

(Larger organisation, telecoms)

CVs from military personnel are not able to articulate skills in a way that HR will pick up as they don't appear to match requirements.

(Larger organisation, oil and gas)

The CVs I get through networking all too often break the basic rules of four pages vs. grabbing the attention in half a page. There is now a change in the market and a greater need to focus on core competencies. Maybe the military needs to look at a recognised competency set such as the CIPD [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development] core competencies and compare these with military competencies. The language has to move away from military terminology.

(Larger organisation, mining)

requirements. During the interviews there was noteworthy criticism of the standard of Service leavers' CVs, despite it being taught extensively during the resettlement process. Of course, this is hardly a unique observation as CV writing features frequently in a variety of 'top tips' guides from UCAS to LinkedIn, and a whole industry has grown up to feed off confused applicants. Some of the (occasionally contradictory) comments made by employers are:

CVs were a hot topic in the research and those with opinions had lots of recommendations. However, care needs to be taken to separate personal preferences from different industry requirements. Moreover, none of these ideas will be new to the MOD's resettlement trainers; but it is a useful indicator of how well training is assimilated by Service leavers that employers nonetheless make such comments. Employers' suggestions for improvements in CV writing (and job interviews) included:

- Service leavers should be trained in CV writing and be able to communicate their complementary skill sets in interviews.
- Service leavers should be given training, and help, to complete online job applications.
- Senior ranks need more help than junior ranks as they are often seen (no matter how unfair this is) as being too institutionalised. The MOD needs to profile senior candidates and make them interview-ready.
- The MOD needs to ensure that CVs sell Service leavers' transferable skills using language that matches civilian competencies.
- Each Service leaver should have two or three different CVs depending on the company they approach, even if the companies are in the same sector.
- Ex-military networks could give Service leavers feedback on their CVs and offer advice on how to improve them.

5.4.3 The part played by the employer

Perhaps not surprisingly employers' views were mixed on the perceived trade-offs involved in employing and training Service leavers. Larger companies were more prepared to train staff, while smaller organizations were much more likely to point out the expense and difficulty of committing time to inducting Service leavers into their businesses. However, companies of all types and sizes admitted they could gain by hearing about employers who had benefitted from successfully recruiting and training Service leavers. It was noticeable across the research sample that there was little or no awareness of the employer training placement programmes and their benefits.

5.5 Once in employment

Employers observed that not all Service leavers found it easy to adapt into the civilian workplace, and made a number of suggestions as to how this might be improved:

- A 'buddying' scheme post-training can be crucial to helping Service leavers integrate into the business.
- Companies need to understand the mindset of Service leavers (and their families) and be prepared to help them adapt accordingly.

6. Conclusions

This report identified four types of employer in terms of their attitude to the employment of Service leavers and the transition process. While there is considerable overlap in their views, each type has somewhat different needs.

<p>Type 2 – Knowledgeable but dissatisfied</p> <p>These ‘military savvy’ employers need to feel valued. They believe they have specific and useful recommendations that will improve the transition process. Often these employers need help in selling the idea of taking on Service leavers to the rest of the company – especially to HR, who may believe the military ethos and life to be very distant from their company’s culture and skill requirements.</p>	<p>Type 1 – Knowledgeable and satisfied</p> <p>These employers need continuous and good account management from the MOD to maintain their interest in the recruitment of Service leavers. However, these employers’ requirements may change in response to changes in the market place. Just because they have employed Service leavers previously, it cannot be taken for granted that they will necessarily employ them tomorrow.</p>
<p>Type 4 – Unknowledgeable and unreceptive</p> <p>These employers need to be persuaded with examples of Service leaver success stories in the business environment (e.g. ‘Employing female Service leavers helped balance our business and enabled us to enter the modern age’). They also need to see evidence of how employing Service leavers can add real value and even help an organisation to gain competitive advantage. Many of these employers believe it would not be practical or economic to train Service leavers and bring them up to speed. They need examples of work placements in action and to be told and convinced of the benefits.</p>	<p>Type 3 – Unknowledgeable but receptive</p> <p>These employers need to be connected with the benefits and ease of employing Service leavers. Although they may feel good about the principle of taking on Service leavers, the reality is that it is usually a priority. Some of these employers are expanding into new areas, or operate in ‘hot spot’ parts of the country, and need to employ staff quickly. However, it has not occurred to many that Service leavers are a great resource.</p>

Other common issues were raised in this report.

- Employers wish to have easy and early access to Service leavers who are transitioning to civilian life – to help in planning for the year (and further) ahead.
- Many employers are critical of Service leavers' networking and CV writing skills. A suggestion is to use the experience of volunteer employers, who have undergone the transition themselves, to mentor and advise other Service leavers in honing these skills. These employers could also give valuable feedback to the MOD about their experience of employing Service leavers and what companies require.
- The idea of skills mapping was mooted as a way of helping employers with little or no knowledge of recruiting ex-military personnel to assess the relevance of Service leavers' skills to business. So too was the idea of Service leavers having a 'skills passport' that would equate skills to the relevant requirements of the industry in which they are seeking employment.
- Female Service leavers can help challenge unhelpful stereotypes about the macho culture of military life. This is especially important in industries that employ many women already and for male-dominated sectors that want to 'balance' their workforce and better reflect the makeup of UK society today.
- The very senior ranks seem to suffer most in terms of unhelpful stereotypes. Some employers believed this group needs intensive support during transition.
- Finally, employers were very clear in the research that many of their sectors are changing (in some cases, dramatically) and that the transition process needs to reflect and acknowledge this. Similarly, Service leavers need to be aware of these developments and factor them in to their job seeking strategies.

Appendix 1: The discussion guide

1. Recruitment

- a. How would you describe the current recruitment market?
- b. What's important to you from a recruitment perspective?
- c. How would you describe your recruitment strategy?
- d. What types of people have you hired over the last 6 months/year?
- e. What criteria have you been using in your recruitment, e.g. any specific skills you are looking for and types of experience?
- f. What is your present cost per hire?
- g. Have your recruitment needs changed over time in anyway?
- h. Have you got any issues/frustrations with recruitment at this time?

2. What are the methodologies you use to recruit and which are the most successful?

- a. Are they: internal/third parties/external/online/recruitment fairs/traditional/a combination?

3. Do you hire/target ex-service personnel?

- a. What is your perception/interest in hiring ex-service personnel?
- b. Have you hired any ex-service personnel in the last 6 months/year/previously at any level?
- c. Where would you go if you specifically wanted to recruit ex-service personnel?
- d. Would it be similar or different to your usual sources?
- e. What in your view are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the sources?

In more detail:

- a. What do you see as the possible fit between ex-service personnel and your business?
- b. What do you see as the key benefits of hiring ex-service personnel?
- c. What are the perceived opportunities and any possible barriers?
- d. If you don't recruit ex-service personnel currently, why not?
- e. What is your understanding of the skill base of ex-service personnel?
- f. How would these suit particular roles within your organisation?
- g. How would you judge the readiness of new Service leavers for the recruitment process in your business?
- h. How well do you think ex-service personnel would fit into your company culture?

Pulling together learning:

- i. Specifically to meet your company needs, what improvements (if any) would you recommend with regard to transition training and preparation?
- j. Putting yourself in the shoes of ex-service personnel, how confident would you feel companies like yours would be keen to consider them for employment and why?

4. Thinking about everything that we have discussed, is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2: Research method and sample

Interviewees

In the following industry sectors, interviewees included: chief operating officers, HR directors, HR managers, entrepreneurs, recruitment consultants, forces project managers and heads of department. Figure A1 shows the breakdown by sector.

Figure A1: The research sample by sector

Industry/Sector	Large	SME
Retail/FMCG	4	1
Pharmaceutical	1	
Security/facilities management	4	2
Charities	2	1
Drink and entertainment	1	3
Finance/banking	2	
Call centres	2	
Telecommunications	2	
Public government bodies	1	2
Oil and gas	4	1
Transport/logistics	1	2
Mining	1	
Recruitment agencies		3
Port authority		1
Manufacturing		2
Education		1
Defence		1
Energy		3
IT		1
Private postal services		1
Legal		1
TOTAL	25	26

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