

Applying behavioural insights to successful transition



Improving transition out of the Armed Forces: engaging families through behavioural insights

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Executive summary

Background

Each year, thousands of people sign up to serve in the UK's Armed Forces. The commitment is all encompassing: irregular hours and time away from loved ones, often in dangerous situations. Families of Service personnel mirror this commitment, often uprooting their lives every few years for a new posting and managing a household singlehandedly for prolonged periods of time. Although frequent relocation can be challenging, the move back to civilian life – a move made by 15,000 serving personnel each year – can be the hardest of all. Families play a key role in supporting their serving person to successfully transition out of the Armed Forces and as such, there is an increased call to better understand and recognise their transition experience. Commissioned by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) have been working to answer two questions:

1. How do families of Service personnel experience transition?
2. How can insights from research with families, coupled with an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, be used to improve the transition process?

In this summary report, we present the results of this work.

Method

53 semi-structured interviews were conducted with families (primarily partners), veterans (who had left the Armed Forces in the last 5 years) and serving personnel who were planning to leave the Armed Forces in the next 2 years. Purposive sampling – an approach that ensures relevant characteristics are represented at interview – was used to identify participants. Our sample included families from the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force. The interviews, conducted in-person or via telephone, focused on families' experience of transition in areas including: housing, employment, identity and community, social networks, finances, and health.

Behavioural insights and the EAST Framework

Academic fields such as behavioural economics, experimental psychology, and social anthropology seek to understand how individuals make decisions in practice and how they are likely to respond to different situations. Their insights enable policy makers to design policies or approaches that encourage, support and enable people to make better choices

for themselves and society. Together, this research and its application in practice are termed 'behavioural insights'.

To make the key takeaways from behavioural insights accessible, BIT uses a simple framework that helps structure our approach and ensures our recommendations are easy to understand. This is the EAST framework, which describes how to encourage behaviour change by making systems and processes more: Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely. This framework was used to structure the thematic analysis of the interviews, grouping key barriers and facilitators to transition accordingly. Since many of the barriers relate to more than one category in the EAST model, we identified the most pressing barriers and facilitators to family engagement, and aggregated the recommendations into four key recommendations (Table 1). This balances the detail and richness of thematic analysis against the need for concise and actionable headline recommendations.

Key recommendations

Table 1: Summary of research findings and recommendations

Recommendation	Rationale	How to do it
<p>1. Reduce information overload</p>	<p>Too much information available and too much choice leads to serving personnel and their families postponing engaging with transition, often until it is too late.</p>	<p>Help families plan how they will break down transition into smaller, more manageable steps, in order to achieve their long-term goals; providing them with information about what steps need to be considered early on and how long each step takes. To encourage follow-through, set deadlines, send useful tips and reminders and make certain tasks that require long-term planning the default (such as auto-enrolling people into saving). Reduce the impact of unexpected delays by ensuring families have a set of steps to complete.</p>
<p>2. Involve the family in transition support</p>	<p>Communication, information and support often does not reach the family, and even when it does, it is not sufficiently tailored to their needs.</p>	<p>Ensure that information and support is accessible to families, both in that the language is inclusive and attendance is logistically feasible. This could include designing a system where serving personnel and families select the topics that are applicable to them, receive tailored advice and are connected with people in similar circumstances. Encourage families to turn up by setting up a direct channel of communication with families, or through existing channels, either by forwarding emails sent to serving personnel or through meaningful messengers, such as the Chain of Command personally inviting families to turn up.</p>
<p>3. Tap into social networks</p>	<p>Strong social networks are key sources of information and</p>	<p>Tap into existing social networks or generate new ones (for those with weaker networks) to encourage knowledge sharing</p>

	support, with veteran networks providing insider knowledge on what to expect and how to cope.	and support. For example, this could include serving personnel nominating a family member to be their ' <i>transition supporter</i> ' who would receive regular texts regarding transition, tips on what to do and events to attend to facilitate conversations; or pairing families due to leave the Armed Forces with those who have already left.
4. Continue support after transition	There is a perceived absence of support after leaving the Armed Forces and widespread disappointment at the lack of follow-up.	Recognise that transition does not finish at the point in which families leave. For example: making resettlement grants and learning credits accessible after leaving, providing access to support following discharge, signposting to what is available post-transition, and following-up with regular check-ins.

Feasibility and Impact Assessment of Solutions

We ran a workshop with stakeholders to assess the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing each component of the four solutions. Participants scored each of the 11 components out of ten, based on how feasible they were to implement and the potential impact they could have.

We had a loose threshold in mind for eliminating components of solutions; each had to score a minimum of 10/20 overall, with a minimum of 5/10 for the impact component of the rating. All of the components (and the solutions overall) passed this threshold, meaning none were eliminated, and all should be considered for implementation. Whilst an overall high score is important, if it is made up of high impact and relatively low feasibility, it may still be important to pursue. These recommendations are likely to be hard to implement but worthwhile.

Throughout the rest of this report we explain the process by which we arrived at these recommendations, the next steps required to implement them, and further opportunities to make improvements based on this body of work.

Introduction

Changing careers, moving home, switching schools and beginning a life in a new community; for the average family these events normally happen in isolation. For Service families, it is not uncommon for all of these events to occur within a 6-month window. Although transitionⁱ can appear time-limited, fixed within a two-year window in the lead up to a serving person leaving, in practice, the impact it can have on serving personnel and their families spans much longer than that. Transition is an inevitability from the moment a person signs up for duty. It takes significantly longer to prepare for than two years and affects families and serving personnel well after their leave date. In addition, a positive transition experience for both serving personnel and families will significantly enhance eventual success in civilian society and reduce the likelihood of subsequent dependence on support services such as charitable providers or social services.

For many families and serving personnel transition feels nebulous - a patchwork of significant changes that are experienced differently depending on their circumstances. Underpinning these diverse experiences are various barriers and facilitators that can influence how a family and the serving person access information, engage with support networks, seek advice and plan for life after the Armed Forces. As such, although support is available, there tends to be different levels of awareness about what it can offer, when it should be accessed and who it is right for.

This report sheds light on how families and serving personnel engage with support, and plan for their transition. It makes recommendations to improve engagement with the process – simplifying information, involving the whole family, harnessing networks, and ensuring support continues after transition has taken place. Transition is a challenging process – it is hoped that by creating a model of support, based on behavioural insights and lived experiences, it will empower more families and serving personnel to resettle well into civilian life.

Context

Service families play a vital role in ensuring the serving person successfully transitionsⁱⁱ out of the Armed Forces.¹ With around 15,000 serving personnel leaving the Armed Forces each year,² and an estimated 60% of UK military personnel married,³ a significant number of spouses, partners and families are affected by their loved one leaving the Service.

ⁱ For a list of military terms used in this report, please refer to the glossary on p.56. Where possible and appropriate we have used both military and lay terms to increase comprehension for the widest number of readers.

ⁱⁱ This study conceptualises transition as up to 2 years before and after moving out of Armed Services, including the process of preparation.

The majority of serving personnel and their families transition successfully into civilian life.^{4 5} However, there is wide recognition of the difficulties faced by those who leave the Armed Forces, particularly those from more junior or other ranks.^{6 7 8 9} Research suggests veterans may: struggle to identify as a civilian after a prolonged career in the military; find it hard to secure a new career or housing; and experience more mental health difficulties than the average population.^{10 11 12 13}

Much less is known about the direct impact of transition on the partner and children of military personnel.¹⁴ What we do know is that partners and children, who do not receive any direct communication from the military, often experience confusion, fear of the unknown and misguided expectations relating to transition.^{15 16} Recent research by the Armed Forces Families Federations aims to share the experiences families encounter as they go through the transition process. They recommend that more should be done to empower families to take an active role in transition through better information and more realistic expectations of the challenges and opportunities posed by such a life event.¹⁷

Our research builds upon this growing body of work¹⁸ to explore the various barriers and facilitators families and serving personnel face when transitioning out of the military.

Project background

The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) was awarded a grant by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) to apply behavioural insights to better understand and improve engagement of Service leavers' families in accessing transition support services. 'Families' primarily refers to the partners of Service leavers, although the impact on any children and parents is also considered where relevant.

This report is the second of two we have published on the topic. The first comprises a review of the academic literature, identifying the cognitive biases and barriers relevant to accessing support services, and presents ways in which we can design systems to better align with our understanding of human behaviour.¹⁹ Our research presented here builds upon this literature to explore how these biases and barriers manifest themselves in families and serving personnel who have recently experienced, or are approaching, transition. Through 53 in-depth interviews we explore how families experience transition, and the extent to which they draw on the support available.

Method

The purpose of our research was to understand:

1. How do families of Service personnel experience transition?
2. How can insights from research with families, coupled with an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, be used to improve the transition process?

To address these questions, we specifically focussed on engagement – what hinders or facilitates a family and serving personnel accessing the information and support available to them.

Background research

BIT conducted two site visits and interviewed a range of stakeholders from the Ministry of Defence (MOD), third sector organisations and the Armed Forces, to gain a deeper understanding of the current context and experience of resettlement and transition across the three Services. This was followed by a workshop with key stakeholders from the MOD, FiMT and the Families Federations,ⁱⁱⁱ to help map the current transition process from a serving person's and family's perspective, as well as understand which demographic characteristics^{iv} were important in transition. Finally, BIT conducted a literature review on how behavioural insights could be used to improve access to, and engagement with, support services, published in July 2018.²⁰ The main part of the research focussed on barriers and facilitators to engaging in transition, and transition support. It explored this topic through five research questions:

ⁱⁱⁱ We would like to thank the representative from the MOD, FiMT, NFF, AFF and RAFFF who took the time, throughout the course of this project, to advise and share their insights. We are also grateful to all the organisations that promoted this research within their networks.

^{iv} For this study, Service, transition stage, location and gender were captured.

Research questions

1. What are the key challenges faced by families and Armed Services personnel when transitioning out of the military?
2. What are families' and Armed Services personnels' current experiences and perceptions of the support offered by the MOD and voluntary organisations?
3. What are the current contact points and information sources used by families and Armed Services personnel?
4. Which social groupings do families and Armed Services personnel identify with, and what do they see as the behaviours and attitudes that underpin those identities?
5. What support services are provided by MOD and partner organisations, and what challenges do they encounter in the delivery of services?

We conducted 53 semi-structured interviews with families and their serving person from across the Royal Navy (including Submariners and Royal Marines), the British Army and the Royal Air Force.^v These were either in person, or via telephone, at the participant's discretion. Table 2, below, summarises the participants' characteristics.^{vi}

Table 2: Participant characteristics

	Pre-transition	Post-transition	Service leaver	Family member	Both
Royal Navy	9	4	2	10	1
British Army	7	20	1	24	2
Royal Air Force	6	5	2	6	3
Combination	1	1	1	0	1

We recruited participants via social and print media advertisements with help from third sector organisations and the HIVEs. The interviews took place in autumn 2018. The interviews were recorded, and sound files subsequently pseudonymised, transcribed and then deleted. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the qualitative software Dedoose. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcriptions, with a coding framework

^v Please see the Appendix for detailed information on the study design, including participant characteristics and sampling frame information.

^{vi} Veterans that served in 2 military branches have been recorded once in each branch and corresponding transition.

designed to capture the dimension of transition and the behavioural biases. Co-coding tests were conducted to minimise the differences in code application between the team.

Ethics

The research plan was submitted to the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee and was approved in October 2018, reference number: 901/MODREC/18.

Findings

Our results are structured as follows: first, we describe key findings from the thematic analysis. Second, we present four headline recommendations on ways in which this work could be adopted in practice. Finally, we discuss implementation considerations.

While most research in this domain presents themes by dimension of transition (housing, employment, finances, wellbeing, health), we present our findings based on the behavioural foundations of the key barriers and facilitators identified during the interviews. We do this using BIT's EAST framework: a simplified account of behavioural insights that encourages users to make behaviour change: Easy, Attractive, Social, and Timely. We believe the same underlying patterns of behaviour lead to issues across the dimensions of transition, depending on the context of the families and serving personnel. It is hoped that structuring our report on underlying behaviours, rather than on issues unique to each component of transition, will help frame our solutions and recommendations as preventative and more universally applicable.

Within each EAST category are several sub-themes, each accompanied by tailored solutions we believe will help overcome identified issues or amplify enablers. These are based on the academic literature around behavioural interventions, as well as our own experience developing policy interventions. A brief summary of findings and solutions can be found at the start of each chapter.

Solutions workshop

In order to assess how easy or difficult it would be to implement our solutions, we conducted a workshop with stakeholders from the MOD, FiMT and other third sector organisations after the analysis and a draft report was completed. With the group, we shared our top 12 solutions to the four most prevalent themes that emerged from our analysis. Drawing on the experience and expertise of this group helped us to assess how feasible our ideas were, and how much of an impact they would make if implemented. This workshop also provided us with valuable contextual and cultural insights that could help, or hinder, a solution if implemented. The 12 solutions were then scored and ranked to help us decide which warranted further exploration. The results from this workshop can be found on pages 50-52.

01 / EASY

Humans, by nature, tend to go with the option that is easiest: maybe it is the least hassle, the low hanging fruit, the simplest to complete, or the least overwhelming. These seemingly small tasks and barriers can have surprisingly large consequences. This first section outlines how families and serving personnel approach transition planning and the eventual difficulties they face due to its complexity and the number of tasks involved.

Key barriers and facilitators	Potential solutions
<p>Transition is overwhelming as it comprises multiple significant life events, often occurring all at the same time:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transition is de-prioritised due to other day-to-day pressures. 2. Serving personnel and their families focus on short-term next steps, as opposed to long-term planning. 3. Aspects of transition that require long-term engagement, such as saving, are often left too late. 	<p>Help families plan and set goals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Break transition down into 'chunks' and sub-goals. 2. Develop SMART plans relating to specific elements of transition. 3. Use defaults to guide transition.
<p>The amount of information and support available is vast, which makes it hard to find and process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relevant information is difficult to find. 2. The use of technical language or military jargon is difficult to understand for non-serving family members. 	<p>Simplify the provision of information and support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a simple checklist/pack of activities that needs to be completed early on. 2. Ensure that language is simple and jargon-free. 3. Normalise help-seeking by providing FAQs. 4. Help families find the information most relevant to them.

There are a number of unexpected steps required to accessing support, leading to drop-offs in take-up:

1. Serving personnel and families encounter numerous small hurdles whilst trying to complete transition related tasks.
2. Some hurdles disproportionately affect family members, such as workshops being held on base or during working hours.

Reduce friction in the transition process:

1. Reduce or simplify the steps required.
2. Hold activities at accessible times and locations via multiple channels.
3. Minimize the impact of unavoidable barriers, share estimated waiting times and suggest other tasks that can be completed during waiting periods.

Transition is overwhelming as it comprises multiple significant life events, often occurring all at the same time:

For families and serving personnel approaching transition, the sheer volume of tasks and events can make transition difficult to conceptualise. This can lead to longer term planning being deprioritised as more day-to-day commitments take precedence. Although actioning short-term goals can bring about a sense of achievement, some of the most important elements of transition require planning almost from day one, such as financial saving and housing. Failing to put these long-term plans in place can lead some families and serving personnel to struggle after they leave. Many families interviewed post-transition felt that, in hindsight, they should have made better plans. This was particularly true for those who encountered unexpected difficulties with mental health problems, gaining employment and securing a home post-transition. Some families also realised that other factors coinciding with their transition made it much more difficult to plan, for example, transitioning during their children's GCSEs or their exit date landing at a time when the job market was particularly challenging.

When humans make decisions, judgements and process information, we draw on our **cognitive resource**^{vii} to help us complete these tasks. When someone is under pressure, they can find it more difficult to make decisions - this is known as **cognitive overload** - not having enough **capacity** to process all the information required to make decisions. Serving personnel and their partners can be under such pressure with the number of significant life events that can happen in a short space of time - changing jobs, relocating and integrating into a new culture or community.

“It is difficult to think about it because there has been so much.... I think resettlement is very overwhelming... You are leaving a big part of your identity and your career behind and you need a lot of direction and guidance.”
(Participant 70, F, Pre-Transition, British Army/ Royal Air Force)

^{vii} For a definition of the Behavioural Science terms in bold in this report, please refer to the glossary on p.54.

The sheer amount of transition tasks that need to be completed whilst continuing to do regular duties felt insurmountable for some interviewees. As a result, although they were motivated to complete transition tasks, they never found the time to put their plans into place. Our unmet desire to complete a task, but not managing to do so, is called an **intention-action gap**.

“He’s going to have his hands full, trying to get his things in order...and for me to support him during that time...coming home and having to sort out a bunch of paperwork, not only for the new job...but for leaving the military. I know he had a deployment coming up, and so that’s been an issue, whether he was going on it or whether he wasn’t going on it. So, everything is up in the air and we’re not sure.” (Participant 90, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Air Force)

At times, this led interviewees to focus on the short-term next steps ahead of them, as opposed to longer-term goals. A tendency to place greater value on immediate gains, at the expense of long-term intentions, is known as **present bias**. This has been shown to lead to procrastination, especially when future events feel so far in the future.

“I think it’s just one step at a time really, because in fact we have just recently moved to this new posting, so we’ve had a lot of changes recently with both of us having different employment challenges and then having to settle older adult children in various places” (Participant 85, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Air Force)

This may be compounded by perceptions around the ease of transition. For example, some families that were interviewed pre-transition described having no plan B, sticking to their day-to-day routine and feeling optimistic that everything would work out. In reality, the volume of tasks to complete and the array of information and support available about transition makes this process difficult to navigate successfully in a short amount of time.

Solution 1: Help families plan and set goals

1. Break transition down into ‘chunks’ and sub-goals. Help people visualize how long-term goals can be reached through smaller, more manageable steps. This can reduce procrastination and maintain engagement as people gain a sense of accomplishment after reaching each sub-goal.

2. Develop SMART plans relating to specific elements of transition. Also known as an ‘implementation intention’ exercise, this involves asking people to identify when, where and how they will complete their goals. Making intentions specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-framed, helps convert them into action. Serving personnel and families can also be better prepared for unexpected events by having contingency plans (e.g. filling in forms with ‘*top three future careers*’ and ‘*top three areas to move to*’).

3. Use defaults to guide transition. Identify transition components that require long-term action and minimise the hassle factor required to engage in these. For example, automatically enrol leavers into a scheme that transfers a % of their monthly salary into a savings pot or a ‘*civilian transition fund*’ unless they opt-out. A cost of living calculator could be used to help assess the amount to save (the cost of a month’s rent, an electricity bill, or an NHS dentist appointment).

The amount of information and support available is vast, which makes it hard to find and process:

Relevant information is difficult to find. Receiving information on all aspects of transition, from a variety of organisations and services, meant families had to filter through large amounts of information from multiple organisations. This was particularly challenging when the serving person was away on duty or during moments of high stress. In addition to this, families often did not know what problems they would face later on. As a result, they found it hard to predict which areas of support they should explore further.

The vast number of tasks to be completed during the transition process, and the volume of information or support that could be accessed, resulted in a **choice overload** for many families. Counter-intuitively, more choice has not shown to necessarily lead to better outcomes and can make decision-making more difficult. This can lead individuals to stick to the default or pre-set option, or not make a choice at all. Families and serving personnel cited a range of transition information providers and support: the Resettlement Teams, Career Transition Partnership, third sector organisations; unit welfare officers, superior officers and social networks. The sheer number of these made it difficult for families to know which one to turn to for their specific needs. Overall, too many support options coupled with too many decisions to make, often demotivated families from engaging in the transition process altogether.

“I wouldn’t know where to start, or who to ring up and say that I’m a partner of an ex-marine and I don’t know what to do. I mean do you ring up the Legion, do you ring up Help for Heroes? I wouldn’t know where to start.” (Participant 94, F, Post-Transition, Navy)

As well as filtering for the correct organisations to provide information, the use of technical language or military jargon was difficult to understand. This was most pronounced in topics that were new to serving personnel, such as financial planning. Families of serving personnel also found the use of military language confusing and frustrating. In both these scenarios the information or advice provided was not easy to digest and act upon. Pension and complaints procedures were both mentioned multiple times by participants to be particularly challenging – due to the language used, and the topic.

“The information is out there, but your interpretation might be wrong...I am a civil servant, and I don’t understand it. They send you paperwork...and it’s like reading Chinese because they use a lot of jargon.” (Participant 43, F, Pre-Transition, British Army)

Additionally, families going through certain processes like complaints, may be facing additional stresses and pressures. This was an added burden to families, who in some cases, opted out of complaining at all and getting the support that they needed.

“You are literally like a rabbit in headlights, because you are thinking where do I go and what do I do, and how do I pay these bills when there is no income coming in. There was so much to do and the complaint form was so thick... there was too much information in there that we didn’t know what we were reading because it was so complex... we just went ‘I’m not bothering’.” (Participant 37, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Helping families to understand the type of information that is useful, at the right moment, will be essential to ensure that they engage in what is available to them. Using non-technical language (that avoids the use of military jargon) can help facilitate this process for families.

Solution 2: Simplify the provision of information and support

1. Create a simple checklist/pack of activities that need to be completed early on.

For example, provide families with a prioritising checklist of transition steps with indicative timelines. Families should be given some agency in selecting their top priority areas e.g. if the family already owns a house but the serving person is suffering from PTSD, the checklist and information pack should focus on accessing psychological support and not provide information on housing.

2. Ensure the language and content of support services is easy to understand and navigate for non-military members and for topics that are new to serving personnel. Information could be housed in one system where serving personnel and

families select the topics that are applicable to them, receive tailored advice for the situation they are in, and read about people who are in similar circumstances to them, for example, looking for a similar career.

3. Normalise help-seeking. Provide FAQs to normalise help-seeking behaviours and increase awareness about the realities of transition and commonly faced problems.

4. Help families find the information most relevant to them. Create decision trees, to help families find tailored information, and to help support services better re-direct families and serving personnel who reach out to the wrong organisation.

There are a number of unexpected steps required to accessing support, leading to drop-offs in take-up:

Serving personnel and their families face a number of hurdles when they plan for transition and try to access support. Filling in forms, booking and getting sign-off on training courses, waiting lists, organising transport and childcare can all lead to substantial delays. Some of these barriers disproportionately affected family members, such as workshops being held on base or during working hours. These seemingly small hurdles to engagement are known as **friction costs**, as they require little effort to overcome but disproportionately discourage action.

Although families are entitled to attend transition workshops, the majority of interviewees had not attended. Several reasons were cited for this, for example living too far away from a military base, or not being available to attend workshops during the day due to work or childcare commitments. For several families living further afield, financial barriers prevented them from attending, as their travel expenses could not be reimbursed.

“They say that the spouse is invited to go, but we are posted in Belgium and the courses are in the UK. They don’t pay for the spouse to travel there and back, and we have got young children... The children aren’t going to sit through a day-long finance course, nor can we leave them...because we haven’t got family here to look after them.” (Participant 91, F, Pre-Transition, British Army)

Reducing the effort or steps involved in undertaking an action is likely to encourage the desired behaviours. Small tweaks to pre-existing processes, such as accessing workshops online, would help increase access to the support and information.

Solution 3: Reduce friction in the transition process

1. Reduce or simplify the steps required. Identify drop-off points in a process and simplify these processes. For example, pre-filling forms and providing pre-addressed envelopes.

2. Hold activities at accessible times and locations via multiple channels. Deliver services both face-to-face and online and provide financial support for childcare and travel.

3. Minimize the impact of unavoidable barriers. Where barriers such as delays due to waiting lists and getting sign-off cannot be removed, ensure serving personnel and their families receive recommendations on what they can do in the meantime.

02 / ATTRACTIVE

We are more likely to do something if it draws our attention. Ensuring support systems are designed to encourage people to use them, much like in advertising or marketing, will increase the likelihood of driving families towards the support they need. This section discusses ways in which we can make the process of engaging in support services during the transition period as attractive to serving personnel’s families as possible.

Key barriers and facilitators	Potential solutions
<p>Information about transition does not feel relevant to families, often until it is too late:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support and information is not tailored to the family. 2. People are over-optimistic about their own outcomes. 	<p>Tailor information, signposting and materials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide information and support that is tailored to the needs of the family and their circumstances. 2. Provide emotive case studies that reflect the value of seeking support. 3. Incentivise attendance at transition related meetings, workshops and support services at the right time.
<p>Families who focussed on the benefits of transition appeared better engaged in transition support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negative experiences of transition services are more salient than the potential benefits incurred. 2. Leavers and their families can feel devalued by the Armed Forces after their exit. 	<p>Focusing on gains as opposed to losses facilitates engagement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase serving personnel’s awareness on the benefits of transition. 2. Help serving personnel and families to visualise the benefits of transition to their ‘future self’. 3. Inform leavers on what others do to normalise preparation and create a sense of what is expected. 4. Use gamification to support sustained engagement with transition. 5. Reference appreciation for serving personnel and their families’ years of service and commitment to the Armed Forces in communications.

Information about transition does not feel relevant to families, often until it is too late:

When support was accessed, serving personnel and families commented that it was not sufficiently tailored to their needs or transition circumstances. **Personalisation** is very important to consider when providing information to those who need it, as they are more likely to focus on information that is relevant or significant.

Information and support that had been accessed by family members was often described as general and unspecific, or that the family had discovered it by chance. Families explained that they required tailored, individualised support, personal to them and their circumstances. As opposed to services offering a 'one-size fits all' approach to transition support, tailoring signposting to relevant charity organisations based on needs, was recommended by partners during the interviews.

“Initially the Royal Air Force weren’t particularly helpful you know... But when I actually dived into the policy myself, read through it and got an understanding and worked out what was available to me, they were more helpful when I told them what I needed.” (Participant 70, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Air Force/British Army)

Families found it particularly unhelpful when the advice they received simply repeated generic information provided in military leaflets and information booklets. Specific information, on the other hand, was perceived as invaluable. An interviewee described how they had accessed support from a financial advisor who was an ex-Serviceman and who, through his own experience, tailored the advice he was able to provide. This meant the family received valuable and applicable information relevant to their particular financial situation during transition.

“I have a financial adviser, who is an ex-Serviceman himself, and he has been my financial adviser while I was in the military as well as after having left. He was a fantastic source of information and offered pointers in terms of financial planning during that transition.” (Participant 30, M, Post-Transition, Navy/Royal Air Force)

The quantity of information communicated to serving personnel, and the way in which it was delivered, meant that the message often felt less relevant. For example, some serving personnel received information about transition whilst on tour. This meant that the information was never even read. Getting people to pay attention to information in the first place is clearly a necessary first step, however the salience of the message within the communication is just as important. Communications must be designed in such a way as to be powerful enough for families to recognise the implications of these changes, but at the same time, not scare them into disengaging entirely.

“Because a lot of these men and women, when they sign up at the age of 18, have the Army do everything for them... from doctor appointments, payments, everything... your meals and your accommodation are taken care

of. Then, you end up outside of the Forces and questioning, so how do I see a GP, where do I get a prescription from...” (Participant 47, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Support may feel less relevant in some cases as people are, generally, over-optimistic about their own outcomes. This phenomenon is known as **optimism bias**, where someone is less likely to believe a negative outcome will happen to them compared to the average person. This positive perception of one’s own prospects can affect how decisions are made and how much planning is completed.

This was particularly striking when looking at the number of families interviewed that did not have a plan-B and believed that everything would fall into place. When asked, serving personnel also felt that they would not encounter any difficulties during transition. As a result, support was not perceived as valuable at the point in which it was offered. Interestingly, families who had greater knowledge and experience of the civilian world tended to have more realistic expectations. However, without information about support, they could not encourage their serving person to make better use of it.

When families did encounter challenges, they explained that often these had come as a surprise to them. They described that even if they had been made aware of these possibilities in advance, they would not have considered preparing for such hurdles, as they perceived them as being irrelevant to them.

“I suppose had we really thought about it [mental health support] we could have done this ourselves, but at that time you don’t realise the problems that are likely to crop up. ‘Expect this and expect that or it might not be as easy as’ – yes, questions and answers probably would have been helpful.” (Participant 17, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Signposting to support services needs to feel significant to the family, particularly when they are not expecting to experience any difficulties. This may help families to recognise and prepare for transition barriers that they would have previously thought they would not encounter. Interestingly, one partner who worked in the field of resettlement, was able to gain exposure to the common hurdles of transition. This increased the **salience** of potential barriers and the preparation they needed to put in place.

“I spoke to my husband, and to the resettlement guys to make sure everything he was doing was correct. I’m a bit unique in my position because I’m [in admin] and am quite close to the resettlement bit anyway. So, I knew the kind of things that he needs to do before he even did them.” (Participant 54, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Air Force)

Incentives could also be used to encourage families to take proactive steps towards transition. This may include making naturally occurring incentives (such as access to financial lump sums, exciting new career opportunities, and quality time with family), visually and emotionally more salient earlier on. There may also be methods that can be implemented to incentivise families to take proactive steps towards transition (such as providing Armed Forces families with free or discounted memberships to community

services or school and sports clubs, in the family's new location). However, the scale of monetary incentives for families leaving the Armed Forces need to be carefully considered due to the potential negative effects, as illustrated by the following interviewee:

"I do know from other families that when their partner came out in that transition period it was suddenly that they were let loose to do what they want, whenever they want, with a big wad of money in their pocket. My ex-husband I believe ended up with about £40,000 in his bank account as a one-off hit and a nice pension which is great and well deserved. But to receive that kind of money after a few weeks they've left serving, I'm not sure they're quite ready to use it in the best way." (Participant 2, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Solution 4: Make transition more salient and engaging

1. Inform leavers of what others do. Provide accurate information that realistically counterbalances scare-mongering information or single 'newline' negative experiences online. If appropriate, this could include rates of people accessing, and benefiting, from support services.

2. Reference appreciation for service in communications. Personalise the information so that it references the serving personnel's and family's name, years of service, role, duties and awards. This could make the information more relevant to the families and serving personnel, and increase their engagement with transition, as they feel valued.

3. Offer incentives that reward family attendance at transition related meetings, workshops and support services. Rewards may include free-memberships or discounted admission for community activities and clubs in new locations.

Families who focussed on the benefits of transition appeared better engaged in transition support:

Those who perceived there to be benefits to leaving the Armed Forces found it easier to engage with transition activities. There were various motivations mentioned by families and serving personnel to engage in the transition process. These included:

- Entering better-paid or interesting employment.
- Feeling passionate and excited about a new career, studies and opportunities.
- Spending more time with family and young children.
- Becoming more financially stable (ability to go on holiday, buy luxury items).
- Feeling ready to and wanting to leave the Armed Forces and military community.
- Returning home (or to their hometown) and existing social networks.

"Try to focus on that he's got this new job, but it's trying to focus on things that interest him and getting his pilot's license and things like that. So that has helped to try and focus on something else positive, and then obviously you know we are

financially better off. So, we've been able to afford more things and stuff, and go on holiday, so things we couldn't afford before." (Participant 65, F, Post-Transition, Royal Air Force)

Unsurprisingly, the more proactive families and serving personnel had a clearer idea of what they wanted to achieve and how to go about doing this. This led to behaviours such as: engaging with transition activities early on, attending jobs events based on self-awareness of skill sets and career interests, and using the resettlement package to train in a relevant career area. The interviews suggest that other families experience similar motivating factors to transitioning, but do not find them particularly relevant at that point in time.

Visualisation activities, or values affirmation, about what life may be like on 'civvy street' - both the opportunities and challenges - may be valuable to help families understand the upcoming challenges, and help prepare or seek support where possible.

It is also important to consider the effect of negative experiences on transition. We tend to focus on information that is striking or salient, such as information that seems more relevant, and ignoring information that is less apparent. Our interviews suggested that a single negative experience was powerful enough to prevent families from engaging further in support. Be it first-hand, through word of mouth or in the media, negative experiences were particularly influential over families' subsequent decision making. For example, families who received unhelpful, unsympathetic guidance from charities did not seek help from charity organisations again.

"We approached SSAFA and he was told by SSAFA if it is too much stress for you, then just leave. That's not the case. I was being medically discharged and he wanted to be in the military... It doesn't really cut it, so we sort of lost faith in using charities." (Participant 86, F, Post-Transition, Royal Air Force)

It is important to bear in mind how important effective signposting is, to help families continue to engage with the support on offer, even in the presence of setbacks. As the example below shows, the participant might have been better placed going to the Pension Society - but their misdirection caused them to disengage from seeking support altogether.

"He had a lot of questions concerning his pension and we were signposted to Veterans UK. But we found them to be totally unhelpful because they parroted what was in the booklet, which we could read ourselves, and they wouldn't give something more personal or individual." (Participant 92, M, Pre-Transition, British Army)

Service leavers and their families can also feel devalued by the Armed Forces, which affects how they engage with transition. A lack of acknowledgement from the military regarding a serving person's time spent in the Armed Forces, their contributions, and the sacrifices their families had made, left people feeling devalued. This was particularly true for employment support, where leavers and their families felt that they were being directed to jobs of a lower level and pay grade than they were qualified for. Interviewees described being made to feel that their skills would not be recognised or valued in the civilian world.

“He’s come out with other fellow colleagues, and he has got more qualifications than them and they have been directed to high-level senior leadership posts because they came out as a higher rank” (Participant 82, F, Post-Transition, Royal Navy)

This increased the financial and emotional pressure on families, who felt responsible for encouraging their serving personnel whose motivation and self-confidence had been lowered. Individualising the support and information that families receive and developing a channel of communication that enables family members to receive tailored support from the Armed Forces and third sector, is paramount.

Solution 5: Focusing on gains to facilitate engagement

1. Increase Service leavers’ focus and awareness on gains as opposed to losses.

Ensure that the gains associated with transition are effectively communicated, and losses are accompanied with clear calls to action to minimise their impact.

2. Help Service leavers and families to visualise the benefits of transition to their ‘future self’. Encourage Service leavers to think about what is most important in their lives outside of the military and why. Values affirmation exercises could be motivating to help families and serving personnel increase their sense of belonging in the civilian world.

3. Inform leavers of what others do. Provide accurate information that realistically counterbalances scare-mongering information or single ‘newline’ negative experiences online. If appropriate, this could include rates of people accessing, and benefiting, from support services.

4. Reference appreciation for service in communications. Personalise the information so that it references serving personnel and families’ names, years of service, role, duties and awards. This could make the information more relevant to the families and serving person, and increase their engagement with the transition, as they feel valued.

5. Use gamification - the application of game design elements in a non-gaming context - to support sustained engagement with transition. Games tap into key drivers in motivation, encouraging sustained participation. Applying these features into a non-gaming setting could activate a similar mindset, for example, through the use of a mobile app or website where serving personnel and families set personal transition goals. For each goal, users could receive tips of varying difficulties, unlock further support and receive rewards as they progress along. The system could provide users with information about how many others attended or liked particular services. Data could also be gathered on the quality of services and family’s needs for support; by asking users to review the services they use, and to complete surveys to understand where support may be missing.

03 / SOCIAL

Humans are social animals. We are heavily influenced by the behaviour of others around us. Whether we identify with them, or do not want to deviate too wildly from them, we are more likely to engage in something if others around us are doing the same. The following section addresses how social influences and networks can be harnessed to shape the actions of families and serving personnel in transition. Given that the military ethos is heavily rooted in looking out for one another and has a strong culture of support, this was one of the strongest themes to emerge from the data.

Key barriers and facilitators	Potential solutions
<p>Transition is wholly centred around the serving person:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support is centred on the serving person, who may not share necessary information with the family. 2. Family inclusion in military life is often limited to social occasions. 	<p>Refocus transition support on both the serving person and their family:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce a direct channel of communication with families or facilitate the sharing of information. 2. Frame support as key to the well-being of the whole family. 3. Hold off-base transition events.
<p>Military norms and stigma hinder help seeking and information sharing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a stigma around help seeking for the serving person and the family, particularly with regards to mental health and finances. 2. A military identity may hinder serving personnel from engaging in support from the service and their families. 	<p>Normalise help seeking to overcome stigma:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate case studies that model desirable norms of the behaviour you are trying to encourage. 2. Offer signposting to external experts. 3. Encourage discussion of taboo topics in social network interventions (see harness social networks section).
<p>Military hierarchy affected the accessibility of transition support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hierarchies in military family communities impeded the spread of information. 	<p>Leverage military hierarchy for support:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Harness the influence of senior ranks as messengers.

<p>2. Senior ranking or commanding officers had the ability to support or hinder a serving person’s engagement in transition.</p>	<p>2. Encourage good behaviour through feedback.</p> <p>3. Provide more tools and training for senior ranks to support their personnel.</p>
<p>Adjusting to civilian life is challenging across multiple dimensions:</p> <p>1. There are substantial differences between military and civilian norms.</p> <p>2. Living off-base with civilian networks enhanced families’ knowledge of life after transition.</p>	<p>Acclimatise serving personnel with the civilian world:</p> <p>1. Increase Service leavers’ sense of belonging with the civilian world.</p> <p>2. Connect families and Service leavers with veterans’ families.</p>
<p>Social networks are key to disseminating information and providing support:</p> <p>1. A strong military network is useful for receiving tips and insights from people with similar experiences.</p> <p>2. Veteran networks are a key source of informal information.</p> <p>3. A strong civilian network provides crucial information on how to deal with the differences between military and civilian life.</p>	<p>Harness social networks:</p> <p>1. Introduce a transition supporter scheme.</p> <p>2. Encourage the sharing of transition information and resources.</p> <p>3. Help generate new information-sharing networks.</p> <p>4. Create network nudges, where families or serving personnel receive information, a call to action, or advice from someone they relate to.</p> <p>5. Share unused transition entitlements with others.</p>

Support is centred on the serving person, who may not share vital information:

The current policy is for all information and support to be communicated to the serving person only. It is perhaps no surprise then, that families do not perceive this information as targeted to them. In particular, families described how the language regarding transition support and workshops was aimed at the serving person and consequently, they did not feel welcome to attend as a family.

“I think they have transition fairs where you can go along and there’s housing advice, jobs advice, career transition advice - I felt that I wouldn’t feel welcomed there. I think family members can go, but I personally didn’t feel it was for me and looking on the website... the language is all tailored towards

the serving person rather than the family member.” (Participant 29, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Families therefore relied on the serving person to relay information on transition to them. When this communication between families did not occur, partners reported having limited knowledge of the support and relevant services that were available to them. In addition to this, partners also described that the factors associated with transition that they felt responsible for, or would have to deal with, often differed to those of the serving person. As such, they would have benefited from the opportunity to ask questions directly.

“In terms of as a spouse, I think you know, we are the ones that run the home, sorting the kids out because he’s working. So, I’m the one that’s going to have to be you know... when it comes down to doing like the student finances... it’s me that’s going to have to help her to do that because her Dad is too busy.” (Participant 95, F, Pre-Transition, British Army)

In addition to physical support networks, websites and social networking opportunities provided a source of valuable information for many partners, many of whom found it useful to hear about others’ experiences. Partners that sought out online resources stated that this was a useful way of mitigating issues of communication between themselves, their serving partner, and their Chain of Command.

“The information you get as a spouse is only as good as the information your partner gives to you. I think there is a lot more that they can share and if you know what you’re looking for you can go online... the access to information online is absolutely key, particularly if it’s a conversation that you are having which you don’t want the Commanding Officer, the boss, to know about. You need to be able to access this stuff without going into a physical office.” (Participant 13, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Families frequently cited feeling left out of transition and their serving partner not being open with them about issues. This may relate to a serving person’s **social identity**. Several families cited that military personnel are trained to separate their work and home life – compartmentalizing active duty with down time. This way of working, to help manage trauma experienced in their job, may spill over into their home lives and prevent vital information about transition being shared. The camaraderie between serving personnel may also encourage serving people to reach out to colleagues before their family, especially around issues of transition, as these may be perceived as concerning ‘work’, not ‘home’.

“Quite often it is more that he is speaking to friends that have already left or in the process of leaving the Army. They all talk amongst themselves.” (Participant 55, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

As a result, families received little information regarding transition unless they proactively searched for it. Once they accessed information, this was more often than not, aimed at serving personnel and did not address their concerns. This left families feeling excluded and unsupported, and serving personnel unlikely to bring family members along to transition activities. For families, their role on base was often felt to be solely social. This was

exemplified by families who mentioned their only experience of the military base was during social occasions – dinners and balls.

“They [social events] were always alcohol-based, so like a mess ball that they would have a few times a year, and Christmas functions. Everything that gave them the opportunity to get dressed up and show off their medals which is great but tends to be always alcohol-based.” (Participant 2, F, Post-transition, British Army)

These partners explained that social events did not create a space for them to be open about the support they may need, or the challenges that they were facing. This risks signalling to families that their role on base is social and it creates a division between how serving people and their partners approach the issue.

“For me, I’m completely detached from everything. I have no connections or anything, apart from going to functions like Christmas parties and summer balls and stuff like that. That’s the only time I ever have any contact with Army stuff.” (Participant 101, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

Strategically creating more spaces for non-social occasions, and blurring the boundary between the HIVEs and behind the wire, may help address some of these issues. For example, running transition workshops at the HIVEs, or hosting family information days on the base:

“If the wives were involved more from really the two-year point when they should be doing their civilian transition workshops, she can ask questions and give her the point of contacts if she thinks of anything. So, she’s not relying on just her husband because actually, they are both leaving the Armed Forces and it’s not just him.” (Participant 80, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Solution 6: Refocus transition on both the serving person and their family

- 1. Introduce a direct channel of communication with families.** This could be done by allowing serving personnel to opt-in to automatic forwarding of informational transition emails to a loved one.
- 2. Frame support as being key to the well-being of the whole family.** Explicitly invite families and emphasise the importance of the family being there.
- 3. Hold off-base transition events.** Create spaces to discuss transition and support off base, such as in a local HIVE where there is childcare available.

There is a stigma around help seeking, particularly with regards to mental health and finances:

A military notion of 'hardness', which is tied up in a military identity, prevented many Service leavers from discussing topics that they deemed to be sensitive, with their peers. As a result, leavers were often left feeling alone with their difficulties. Perceiving, witnessing or experiencing stigma is a clear barrier to successful transition as families felt that they could not take action and seek help.

"I don't think he would say that anything is wrong. But if someone was to ring me then I would say well actually.... because he is a man, and been in the Army all that time, they are not always forthcoming with their emotions. Check-in with their partners. Do not assume that if they just ask the guy if everything fine it's a true reflection of what is going on." (Participant 33, F, Post-transition, British Army)

The reluctance to ask for support may have been reinforced by the perception that transition is relatively easy, or that help was only sought once a crisis point had been hit (see **optimism bias** p.19). Families cited that their serving person often relayed minimal information to them, saying 'it's fine', which in turn, prevented families from seeking more advice, or attending meetings themselves. They relied on the serving personnel's belief that they did not need help:

"It's very closed – especially with the Royal Marines. Nobody is willing to admit there is a problem, because they have been conditioned to believe that nothing is a problem, nothing is wrong and that everything can be sorted. They're almost programmed to receive nothing but a focussed, tunnel vision of 'get on with it'." (Participant 94, F, Post-transition, Royal Marines - Navy)

The tendency to not seek help was particularly pertinent for accessing mental health support. Mental health problems, particularly PTSD, were frequently mentioned during interviews. Families felt that often their Service partners would try to minimize their mental health issues on base, but they would see the full extent of the problems at home.

"It had been going on for a long, long time.... But he was too embarrassed to say because when you go to the Army and say look, I'm not coping well and it's a mental health issue, it was a bit scary, because it used to be that you would be medically discharged and it affects your promotion chances, pension chances. So, you just try and cope through things. We weren't coping... That's when he decided that he had to go and tell someone because things were coming to a head." (Participant 23, F, Post-transition, Royal Air Force)

For those serving people that were being treated, one interviewee cited that they did not know how their husband's treatment would transition from military to civilian therapy. In this instance, as her husband's carer, it would have been logical for information about his support and care to be sent directly.

“My husband suffered with PTSD ...the military haven’t said to me when he gets out, this is your support network for that or this is his support network for that. So, if he wakes up and has a dark day now, I’ve got a list of phone numbers I can call and say he is really suffering. But, if that happens when he is in the civvy street I don’t have – that side of it... there are a lot of soldiers and people who need the mental health support once they leave as well.”
(Participant 63, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

There was also a general perception, or **social norm**, that talking about finances should be avoided. A number of families cited that they fell into significant financial trouble or incurred unexpected costs after transitioning. However, that they felt they could not ask or discuss this topic with their peers.

“Whether they are your best friend or not, finances aren’t really brought up and it’s just something that is never really discussed regardless of how close you are; it’s a pride thing and it’s not really spoken about within your circle. You keep your finances to yourself, because when you are in the Army you are not allowed to lend money... It’s all very hush and it’s not spoken about. It is literally behind your bedroom door where it is spoken about and not out in the open.” (Participant 37, F, Post-transition, British Army)

There were several examples during the interviews of serving people not receiving money they had believed, or had been told, they would. Given that the remuneration upon exiting the military is complex, and dependent upon certain milestones, opening up these discussions may reduce the numbers of families who go into debt, or suffer financially, after transition.

“We didn’t know how the finances were going to change, or if we were entitled to any sort of help for childcare services or anything like that. Just if we had somebody to go to, to advise us about what we were entitled to, if anything, that would have been really handy.” (Participant 38, F, Pre-transition, Royal Navy)

Those who experienced financial issues were more open to discussing them after they had left the military and several interviewees mentioned being told to prepare for financial costs by their veteran friends.

“He basically didn’t get what he was told he was going to get and lost a lot of money as a result of it. He felt quite abused by the system really. You give so much to the military and you were not appreciated during your period of resettlement.” (Participant 70, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Air Force/British Army)

As help-seeking may be very difficult for some serving people and hinder them and their families from engaging in support, it is important that systems are designed to account for these biases. Particular attention should be given to financial and mental health support, as we found they were often considered taboo topics.

Solution 7: Normalise help seeking to overcome stigmas

- 1. Case studies that model desirable norms of the behaviour you are trying to encourage.** For example, help-seeking for mental health or family attendance at transition activities. This can be done through the use of case studies or campaigns communicating help-seeking rates if appropriate.
- 2. Offer signposting that enables families to access external experts** for topics they may not wish to discuss with people in their own network.
- 3. Encourage discussion of taboo topics** in social network interventions (see harness social networks section).

Military hierarchy affected the accessibility of transition support:

Despite the HIVEs providing a source of support for many military families - this was not perceived as universal. Support felt less accessible to lower-ranking members of the Armed Forces. Military ranks transposed onto social networks in the HIVEs, with partners of senior and other ranks not interacting much with each other. An **in-group bias** may have led to preferential treatment to those perceived as being similar to oneself. This meant that often social gatherings and informational events were segregated by rank.

“Since I’ve had the children I’ve been a little bit more part of the network ... I was never – because my husband is not ranked...if you are a wife of a Service personnel that is Sargent and above, you get involved and [are] invited to lots of things. If you are merely the wife of a Corporal or a Royal Marine commando, you get invited or involved with nothing except the children and that comes with the church. It’s really rank orientated, and that is really quite sad because in the Marines it’s much harder to get rank than in any of the other Services... There is nothing organised for us as serving wives because my husband doesn’t have rank.” (Participant 82, F, Post-transition, Royal Navy)

Partners of other ranking Service personnel were the most negatively affected. Those feeling labelled and ostracized may have been more prone to the **stereotype threat** - where feelings about being labelled take up cognitive resources and affect subsequent decision making. Partners who worked full time, and who did not have children, also felt they were not able to access the HIVEs. These barriers may prevent knowledge of transition flowing across all families uniformly.

“The way it worked within our Battalion was that my husband was Lance Cpl by the time he got out. So Private and Lance Cpl wives are together and that is it. Anything above that are in their clique, so unless you are in a higher rank you don’t associate with anybody higher than your own husbands and that’s how it was. It’s like a class type thing, so that’s the mentality of the wives. It’s, “she’s only a Lance Cpl wife and I’m not talking to her”. So it’s a bit like a playground.” (Participant 37, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Addressing the hierarchical culture of the HIVEs may encourage more partners to attend and diversify and increase the support and information they are exposed to.

In addition to this, the Chain of Command either facilitated or hindered leavers' engagement. The hierarchical nature of the military may affect how other ranking serving personnel engage in transition. A ranking or superior officer was found to be influential through the information they communicated and the implicit or explicit actions they took. There were several examples of families reporting that their serving person was influenced by their unit or commanding officer to de-prioritise their resettlement.

“When you have got someone sitting and saying that they don't care about preferential draft and we need someone in Scotland, and you are on my mind off you go, bye and thank you very much and your family is just going to have to suck it up.” (Participant 82, F, Post-transition, Royal Navy)

Examples were given of serving personnel being explicitly asked to focus on their unit, relocate for the final year in service or complete duties that made it difficult to attend resettlement workshops, events or retraining:

“You know the needs of the Army came first in which my case was supporting the family of the now deceased. You know, it was put to me that my priority wasn't to leave, so I did it for the good of the family and the Army.” (Participant 99, M, Post-transition, British Army)

However, senior ranking officers could also be a force for good, with some families citing that their support was crucial to their transition. They could enforce time to be set aside to attend retraining, signpost to support, and in one case, help to overrule a GP assessment so that the serving person could enter a desired training course.

“My husband's boss, Captain [X] would come around every two weeks and help us deal with the housing and then he referred us to the Vet's UK to get a caseworker.” (Participant 14, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Given the hierarchical nature of the Armed Forces, it is unsurprising that a **messenger** may disproportionately affect, positively or adversely, more junior ranks.²¹ This was confirmed in our research, with families whose serving partner was generally lower ranking citing this to be more influential than those with a more senior serving person. Senior ranking officers appeared to be able to secure more flexible duties for their final year. Partners of higher ranking officers stated their partner was able to secure a transition-favourable posting in the last few years, where they were closer to home and able to attend training and courses. This flexibility was sometimes due to their own networks with other senior ranking officers:

“This is going to sound really outrageous. We happen to know [X] who was the Head of [X] at the time so he was pretty helpful. That's an unusual situation and we were very fortunate so had we not had that I don't know what would have happened. He provided a reference and that's all that was necessary really.” (Participant 13, F, Post-transition, British Army)

The rank of a serving person, and their Chain of Command, both influenced the extent to which a serving person and their family could act upon information. It is therefore key to ensure units and commanding officers are messaging the value of transition and help their unit plan for transition consistently. As hierarchy is so important, it is essential that serving personnel feel they are able to step away from their duties to focus on themselves, above and beyond the needs of the unit.

Solution 8: Leverage military hierarchy for support

- 1. Harness the influence of senior ranks as messengers** by asking them to send letters encouraging families' attendance at transition meetings and support services.
- 2. Encourage greater engagement through feedback.** Sharing good news stories of officers under their command, or thank you letters, may encourage future support of transition.
- 3. Provide more tools and training for senior ranks to support their personnel.** This could include a monthly newsletter highlighting the transition activities and services happening that month near them.

There are substantial differences between military and civilian norms:

The military identity, and associated norms, influenced how the serving person interacted with both their colleagues and their families. Their transition to civilian life significantly affected their identity, with partners citing that they were often unprepared for the extent to which their lives would change.

“There wasn't enough preparation and support for him, and I don't think there is enough for the families as well. I don't know if it is out there and it's something that he didn't get involved with.... a huge change that's going to impact our lives and you know there is nothing out there for me. There was nothing. No one said are you okay, and quite basically I'm not OK... and I put this down to him being conditioned, institutionalised into the person that he is.” (Participant 94, F, Post-transition, Royal Navy)

Both serving personnel and partners were affected by the change to their routines and moving into a less authoritarian or hierarchical style of employment, something that often spilled over into their home life.

“I had no input whatsoever to prepare me as a family for what it might be like or from what I experience as a wife of somebody who has been you know, institutionalised for 24 and a half years. I've had absolutely no contact...The sort of things that I might need to prepare for. I need support in transition, but I don't know what's going to come out or where I would go to.” (Participant 82, F, Post-transition, Navy)

Norms that were hard to shift were the hierarchical nature of giving and receiving orders, consequences for not fulfilling orders, and the loss of the supportive network where serving personnel would look out for each other.

“The other thing is, no one cares about you in civilian street. No one cares. You know, if you fall over in the street they just watch you fall over. They don’t care. But in the Army you’re a family and soldiers look after each other.”
(Participant 6, M, Post-transition, British Army)

There can be many challenges associated with such a dramatic shift from a military to civilian community. Helping families to plan for this, creating opportunities for their families to recognise these challenges, as well as sharing success stories for managing the shift, would be valuable.

Families who lived off-base and were embedded in civilian life found it easier to predict what issues their spouse might encounter. Their experience in a civilian workplace, or community, often led them to be more attuned to what to expect after the Armed Forces. This helped them prepare their serving person for the culture shift.

“He wouldn’t normally take my advice. But recently, he has been reading some of my old uni work and he’s like, ‘okay it makes a bit of sense now’, you know when you bounce off working life with people or situations and before he was like, ‘I would just tell them to shut up or just make them stop’, and I’m like, ‘well it doesn’t work like that...you’re going to find that really hard. Not everybody is going to be as hard-working as what you’ve found within the people at your work.’” (Participant 88, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Navy)

Several families explained that they suggested the Reserves as a way to manage the culture shock that they felt their spouse would feel moving from military to civilian life. This may help the serving person ease into civilian life, whilst retaining some of the formalities of military service.

“I said to him that when you leave you have to be a reservist or go and join the cadets and help there, because he will really struggle in dealing with people who aren’t military....I have said to him that if he goes into a job and someone doesn’t do what you ask them to, you can’t say to them right, at 6 o’clock tomorrow morning you are on parade as a punishment. I said you have got to just sit down and talk to them and explain. He said, I know, it’s going to be really hard. So yeah, he knows it’s going to be hard but I don’t think he knows how hard it’s going to be” (Participant 65, F, Post-Transition, Royal Air Force)

A family’s experience is an asset to the serving person, harnessing the benefits of their experience between different types of families would be valuable, enabling them to learn from one another.

Solution 9: Acclimatise serving personnel with the civilian world

1. Increase a leaver's sense of belonging with the civilian world: A belonging intervention can include asking people to complete an exercise where they are provided with a brief narrative of a veteran's experience of belonging in the civilian world, followed by a writing exercise in which they are asked to reflect on their own situation.

2. Connect leavers with veteran families, or families living off-base. This can increase their awareness of the differences between military and civilian culture (see *Solution 10: Harness social networks*, p. 39).

Social networks are key to disseminating information and providing support:

A strong military network is useful for receiving tips and insights from people with similar experiences, particularly recent veterans. **Social networks** were an essential component of successful transition but affected families differently depending on whether they were based near a base or located further afield, each having different benefits and challenges.

Families living in accommodation near the base, 'on patch', often had access to the support provided by other military families, with the regular relocation associated with military life creating an open, welcoming and supportive culture on patch.

"In the Army, you instantly make friends on the patch because you move into a quarter, you meet your neighbours, you start chatting to everyone and the sense of community is there. Nine times out of ten, your next door neighbour is already stood on the front doorstep saying hello, are you all right, have you just moved in?" (Participant 25, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Friendships formed through military connections were valuable to many of the interviewees. They were a source of support and had a common shared experience that often formed the basis for very trusting relationships.

"Some of my best friends are Army wives or ex-Army wives. It's very difficult to explain to people who have no experience of the Armed Forces of exactly what goes on. Sometimes you do actually need the support of other people who also have partners serving. Because it is hard to get your head around the fact that they can disappear at a phone call, and they can be away for months on end. Certainly, some of my civilian friends still don't understand. So, despite the cliqueness it is useful to have other people who are going through the same things." (Participant 55, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

Families felt they really benefited from the support networks of the HIVEs – a source of informal support and friends. The welcoming nature of military communities was not typically replicated in civilian life, making transition difficult for families and causing many to feel isolated.

“Where we rented, I think I felt hugely isolated when we first lived there and very much of an outsider in a village where a lot of people had lived for years and years. It was quite an elderly population in the village where we were renting and I did feel that I didn’t quite fit and they couldn’t quite work out where I come from. I did miss that security of patch life.” (Participant 29, M, Post-transition, British Army)

Veteran networks were incredibly valuable sources of information for transitioning families. Due to their own experiences, they were often keen to share information, even for subjects considered a taboo. A number of partners stated they made explicit decisions around transition based upon the information they acquired from friends who had already left the military, particularly around employment opportunities, housing, unexpected costs and processes.

“Friends mentioned to us that...the last move when you finally move out of your Army quarter and into a civilian property, that move you have to pay for. Again, that is just another thing that we had to factor in which is paying for the removal cost...when you have been sheltered from it slightly because it has always been paid for you, you suddenly realise that it’s actually quite a lot of money.” (Participant 15, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Several interviewees who had already transitioned felt that they would have liked to have known someone who had already gone through the process. For some, this was compounded by an over-optimism about the ease of transition.

“We didn’t really know anybody. I suppose in hindsight it might have been handy to have known people, but I don’t think you really realise the relevance of it at the time.” (Participant 17, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Knowing another family in transition was cited as one of the most useful sources of information. However, these networks tended to be stronger for those who had served for longer and came from a higher rank. Fostering communication between the veteran and serving networks would be valuable, enabling families to know what to expect, what to consider, and where to go for help.

“To speak to someone different...would have helped. To understand a little bit more around how people have struggled and what they have found difficult, and how the partners have behaved. Again, everyone is different.” (Participant 87, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Marines)

Whether a family lives near or far from a military base gave them different assets to help with transition. Families living far from base generally had a stronger civilian network. This provided crucial information on how to deal with the differences between military and civilian life. Those with strong civilian ties had greater experience running a civilian household. Families that resided ‘off patch’ had the benefit of being more embedded in civilian life; many of those we spoke to were employed and often lived close to civilian support networks. Some had chosen to stay in a particular location due to their children’s schooling or

proximity to their extended family. Others had been posted in a particular location and subsequently decided to stay. These individuals had the benefit of already living in their post-transition accommodation, whether mortgaged, rented or council-owned.

“It’s my husband’s family that live close by and we’ve got long-established friends here, so actually we’re quite well-settled in this area in terms of friends and support. My job’s in this area and we just function like a typical family would. Sometimes I used to say to my husband that I’d forget that he was in the Army because we didn’t live on a camp or didn’t have that sort of community. So we’ve always lived on the peripheral of that and that’s maybe why I’m not aware of support or what’s available because we didn’t live amongst it.” (Participant 33, F, Post-transition, British Army)

As referenced in the section above (p.34), families living in the civilian community may also have a better understanding of the differences between military and civilian culture and can better prepare their serving person. However, being located away from base can isolate families from accessing information about transition, as they are geographically separated from the serving person and the military community. This affects their ability to attend transition workshops, and also limits the opportunities for the serving person to share information, if they are only home at weekends.

“Where we are now there’s maybe only a couple of Forces families in the area but that’s what we kind of wanted to be honest... our social circle doesn’t tend to include many other Service families... My husband discusses it [transition] with his friends and they would be leaving at the same time. There are a lot of blokes that he knows that are ex-submariners that have gone down the same career route you know, who are already doing it. He asks those for advice and stuff, but I don’t really know, and I haven’t got anything to ask to be honest.” (Participant 5, F, Pre-transition, Royal Navy)

Partners mentioned how this separation would lead the serving person to draw more on their own military networks for support, rather than speak to them. This may mean families off patch possess a more limited knowledge of the support networks available to them.

“Because we lived apart I never got any information. They used to do like a booklet quarterly full of information about what was going on with the kids and the HIVE. But because I lived away from camp I received no information so I was never aware of what was going on and what was available and what wasn’t.” (Participant 37, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Providing the right balance of support, and having someone who can offer friendly, specific advice, but not be too embedded in the pre-existing support network, may create a space where sensitive issues or topics can be discussed more meaningfully. A buddying solution to offering support could be introduced whereby families are paired with another family, who are able to offer advice and support, but who are also not an existing close link of the family.

Solution 10: Harness social networks

1. Introduce a transition supporter scheme. Ask leavers to nominate a “transition supporter”, preferably a family member, to help them stay motivated. This supporter then receives a series of text messages about transition, linked to meetings, conversations prompts and preparation activity ideas, to help facilitate conversations about transition.

2. Provide ways for people who are engaged with support services to encourage others in their networks to actively prepare for transition. Ask serving personnel and families who make use of support services to reach out to other people in their own military networks to encourage them to also engage with the service. For example: “*Please reach out and email your friends and colleagues and let them know about [X]*”.

3. Help generate new information-sharing networks. For example, a Transitioning Veteran Buddy Scheme pairing up partners with someone who has left, to offer transition focused peer-support (in one-to-one or group formats).

4. Create network nudges. Send a letter to families from veteran families who are in a similar circumstance, with a call to action – such as to attend an event or a workshop.

5. Share unused transition entitlements with others. Leavers require differing levels of support depending on their circumstances. Those who do not utilise their learning credits could opt-in to have them automatically assigned to others who would benefit from them more (e.g. family or colleagues) in accordance with a preapproved agreement.

04 / TIMELY

Information will be processed or acted upon differently depending on when it is delivered - knowing when to prompt is therefore crucial. How we conceptualise time can also hinder how we process information - we are more influenced by immediate effects than those in the future. There is also often a substantial gap between a person's desire or intention to act, and the action itself. This section outlines how timing matters in the context of transition.

Key barriers and facilitators	Potential solutions
<p>Internal and external challenges left families unable to dedicate sufficient time to successful transition:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The formal resettlement process anchors serving personnel and their families to start preparing for transition at the two-year mark. 2. In reality, transition tends to require at least double the time currently offered in the resettlement process. 3. Serving personnel and their families typically conceptualise time in terms of tours or postings, which may mean the transition timelines don't resonate with their mental model of time. 4. The location of the last posting facilitates or hinders engagement. 	<p>Encourage serving personnel and families to engage with transition early on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Send timely reminders to serving personnel and families. 2. Provide information about how long each step in the transition process takes. 3. Reframe transition duration language to tours or postings instead of years. 4. Deliver resources through a variety of methods, such as online tutorials, postal support packs and networking events.

Support is not always accessible when needed, or when people are most likely to be receptive:

1. Some families need support earlier but cannot access it; others find it is no longer available when they need it.
2. Transition support is only accessed when at crisis point.
3. Transition support was misaligned with the timings of civilian life.
4. There is limited perceived support post-leaving the Armed Forces, which is when it may be needed most.

Provide access to prompt and flexible support:

1. Work with the Chain of Command to protect the time that is allocated to transition.
2. Communicate that support is not only for those at crisis point.
3. Work with employers to design schemes that offer greater flexibility.
4. Extend the amount of time that support is available.

Internal and external challenges left families unable to dedicate sufficient time to successful transition:

Structurally, the formal resettlement process begins at the two-year mark, with notice being served one year before transition. This can anchor serving personnel and their families to start preparing at this time and not before. **Anchoring** is the tendency during decision making to rely too heavily upon an initial piece of information offered when making decisions.

This bias can affect how serving personnel and their families interpret and plan for their future transition, only starting to prepare once they have reached this period in time.

“I think a year isn’t enough, and he has been out two years now and he’s still struggling. I think almost immediately there should be something in place for him to learn what it’s going to be like. So workshops that he could attend and drop-ins and just having better support that he could go to for better help.”
(Participant 31, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

Confirming this, several families regretted not acting sooner, and discussed the length of time it had taken to readjust.

“We started talking about it four or five years before, and with hindsight I think we left it a year too late. I would say six years is probably when you need to start thinking about it. If you think about an average posting it could be two to two and a half years, you don’t want to wait until you’re in your last posting when you are trying to pull everything together. So I think the posting before that at least, depending on whether you’ve got a house or what you’ve got to go to once you leave the Army. But for us it was certainly about five years

when we started to seriously consider our options.” (Participant 15, F, Post-Transition, British Army)

This interviewee was not alone in realising that in hindsight they should have taken longer to prepare. Transition required more time than families and serving personnel expected. The process was not smooth and often families experienced unexpected delays as they juggled the multiple dimensions of transition.

“There is a very long process to go on courses or work attachments. He has to speak to his seniors to be released, and that has to go up the Chain of Command. But it also has to be signed off by the civilian representative for the resettlement officers. It can take months for something that should only take a day or two” (Participant 55, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

When we asked interviewees about the right time to start preparing, most responses converged around a four-to five-year mark. This is over **double** the amount of time currently offered in the resettlement process.

“We started talking about it four or years before, and with hindsight I think we left it a year too late...you don’t want to wait until you’re in your last posting when you are trying to pull everything together” (Participant 29, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Interestingly, many of the serving personnel and their families conceptualised time in terms of tours or postings. Families tended to approach their life by these landmarks, as that was when they were most likely to face new changes, such as look for a new house, school or job.

“I think it was just breaking it down into those postings. My husband had a three-year posting and then he knew his next job would be another three-year posting. So for him it was he knew it was his second to last posting and it’s now I need to be thinking about this, so that was the confirmation. But he was fortunate that those postings were for three years because sometimes they are less than that, so that was the trigger” (Participant 50, F, Post-transition, British Army)

This reflects, in many ways, the culture of the Armed Forces, as the majority of change for them revolved around moving from one posting to another, or their serving person being on tour for a period of time. As described below, families learnt to adapt their behaviour around the posting and tour system, particularly with regards to planning:

“I had learnt to always wait until I got to the next posting before I got too excited...because of all the change. So you to get to the thinking of, I’ll wait ‘til I get there, I’ll get settled and unpacked. Especially coming back from overseas and you need to start again with everything; new cars, new phones, new everything, so I would do all that and then start looking for a job.” (Participant 15, F, Post-transition, British Army)

Given that preparation to change is conceptualised for many by postings, the length and location of the posting can either facilitate or hinder engagement. Those posted closer to home, or able to spend significant amounts of time at home, were able to “ease their way” back into civilian and family life more smoothly than those that had been posted far away or overseas.

“I would be a lot more worried about him if he hadn’t spent so much time at home recently. He completed a course, summer and paternity leave. If it wasn’t for that, it would have been a massive change from him being on base and in that lifestyle with all the men...My only recommendation would be a lot more time at home, planned time at home.” (Participant 87, F, Pre-transition, Royal Navy)

A posting can not only help assimilation into civilian family life but it can also help the serving person pivot into a civilian career. This strategic decision-making involves long term planning, as postings preferences do not always come through:

“He made a conscious decision that something as an aviation skill is a transferable skill. In his last eight years of serving he did make a deliberate point of trying to target jobs within the military that he could see would have the potential to help him when he left. So you get your posting preferences where you can choose what jobs you want. You don’t always get them but you get that preference, and he did make a conscious decision to try and stay in the aviation sector for when he finally left.” (Participant 29, F, Post-transition, British Army)

However, this ability to strategically choose postings is dependent upon the role. Some roles have a lot less flexibility than others. As the example below shows, they do not always work out even when efforts had been made to secure one:

‘I had been promised co-locating postings to Birmingham and I had to wait 18 months, and I was carrying two jobs at the time until they found somebody to plug the gap. When this other person came in I was back to my own job. I asked them to post me to Birmingham like they had promised, but they had given it to somebody else.’ (Participant 22, M, Post-transition, British Army)

Factoring role flexibility into long-term transition planning would be beneficial to help serving personnel and their families access the support they will benefit the most from.

Solution 11: Encourage early engagement with transition

1. Send timely reminders to serving personnel and families. e.g. text message prompts, email notifications, to inform families and serving personnel of upcoming activities, remind them of meeting appointments and provide useful tips on what to do.

2. Provide information about how long each step in the transition process

takes. For example, average time taken to find employment, move into social housing.

3. Reframe transition duration language to tours or postings instead of years, and highlight that the last posting may hinder one's ability to engage with transition and thus activities cannot be left until the last minute.

4. Deliver resources through a variety of methods to minimise the effect of structural barriers. For example, information and support that can be accessed in immediate e-learning format, information packs and support groups/networks both on and off base, or signposting families to other events at similar times.

Support is not always accessible when needed, or when people are most likely to be receptive:

Both the amount of time required for transition, and the point at which leavers and their families needed to engage with transition, varied depending on the reasons for leaving and the circumstances under which their transition occurred.

For some, information and support was not provided early on enough and their transition consequently felt like a “*ticking clock*” and a “*waiting game*”. Examples included waiting two-months for a resettlement interview, not being able to access training opportunities and not knowing how much to budget due to uncertainty surrounding their retraining allowance.

“When you put your notice in you should receive a fact sheet of what happens next and what you can do...I put my notice in and had a couple of weeks where nothing happened” (Participant 76, M, Pre-transition, Royal Marines)

Others felt that the support that they wanted was no longer available when they needed it. This was particularly true for those who faced unexpected difficulties and for those who were unsure of what they wanted their future career path to be.

“There seems to be quite a good resettlement process but ultimately, if you are not fit enough at the time to make use of it, once you are out you are out and your access to that service is lost.” (Participant 92, F, Pre-transition, British Army)

Accessing help at the right time was further hindered by the stigma around help seeking. Serving personnel were aware of support services but believed these were only for those at crisis point, stating that you had to be “*on your knees*” and “*broken*” before seeking help from charities like SSAFA (Participant 70, F, Pre-transition, British Army). This led to some families and serving personnel to put off seeking support:

“A few months before he left the Army he did go to the doctors to say that he felt absolutely awful and was not coping...but, we were so close to leaving by then.” (Participant 23, F, Post-transition, Royal Air Force)

This was compounded by some families and serving persons' experience of seeking help. There were a number of interviewees who asked for help and were only listened to when at crisis point. This signals to families and serving personnel to seek help in only the most extreme of circumstances:

"I felt that they didn't actually listen when things started to rear their heads...it was a bit too late... My ex was at the point where he tried to commit suicide and that was only when the Army got involved..." (Participant 2, F, Post-transition, British Army)

This perception of stigma surrounding help seeking, and experience of help only being available at crisis point, meant that often families were aware of support services but did not access them.

Transition support was felt to be misaligned with the timings of civilian life, particularly for employment. A number of serving personnel stated that they could not apply for jobs until just a few months before their release date as companies were only offering jobs with immediate start dates.

"There's no point in applying for jobs until the last two months because companies out there are not interested until they know that you are available" (Participant 72, M, Pre-transition, Royal Navy)

This left serving personnel and their families feeling like they had to take a "leap of faith that there would be a job out there" (Participant 30, F, Post-transition, Royal Navy) and not knowing how long they would go without a pay check.

"He's keeping his eye out for opportunities, but I think it's too early to secure anything. No one is going to hire him in 10 months... but I'm optimistic." (Participant 88, F, Pre-Transition, Royal Navy)

This inability to apply for roles too far into the future was coupled by uncertainty of securing one in time to balance the household finances.

"He left in July...but he didn't start his paid employment until October and his first pay check was in November. We did have that time where we were worried for a bit. We knew he would get something, but we just didn't know how long it would take." (Participant 29, F, Post-transition, British Army)

A few respondents also experienced difficulties with their housing, as they were unable to apply for council housing, or join waiting lists, until they left Service accommodation.

"We thought there was a good chance of getting a house and this was six months prior to the actual leave date... and we then found there was none basically available. So, we did leave with nowhere to go in the end which was a big upheaval." (Participant 23, F, Post-Transition, Royal Air Force)

Whilst aligning the serving personnel departure with a job can be challenging, there are a number of activities they and their families can still engage with (e.g. retraining, networking, CV updating). In addition to this, families should be encouraged to save to ensure they have a financial buffer that is long enough to sustain them at least for the average amount of time taken to find a job.

For many families and serving personnel, there was also a misalignment between when support was offered and when they felt they needed it – often the greatest struggles they faced were after transition, when no support or advice was available from the military. The majority of difficulties faced by families and serving personnel discussed in the interviewees were almost all after they had left the Armed Forces. Many families cited that they were surprised and disappointed by the lack of follow up support. Families described that support needs to be promptly accessible and offered to families post- transition, not just pre- transition.

“You get your end of service date, you get a resettlement package and when your date expires, that’s it. You’re let go and you’re just a civvy...you were part of us, now you’re not...there’s no follow up...they don’t try and get in contact with you to see how you’re doing, if there is anything that they can help you with...half the time the resettlement doesn’t hold a job at the end of it. You’re literally left on your own to fathom where and what you’re meant to do” (Participant 37, F, Post-transition, British Army)

The lack of follow up or acknowledgement resulted in widespread resentment amongst families and serving personnel. This was particularly pronounced for those who had served for prolonged periods of time - it felt they had been abandoned by a service they had given their life to. For many interviewees, this was driven by a sense of inequality between what they had given, versus what the military had given them back.

“There is nothing whatsoever acknowledging you for giving up your life for 24 and a half years...I’ve given up my career three times over for my husband and [was subsequently] treated like this.” (Participant 82, Female, Post-transition, Royal Navy)

As referenced above (Solution 2, p. 16), increased recognition of one’s service, coupled with a follow up check-in, would help alleviate this sense of alienation and help signpost families and serving personnel to potentially valuable resources and support.

This structured approach to the timing of transition support means that some families and serving personnel who are unable to benefit, or those who do not perceive it as relevant at that specific point in time, risk slipping through the net. Further to this, there is an urgent call for increased support, or sign posting to available support, once serving personnel leave the Armed Forces and at regular intervals thereafter. Support should be reformulated to be available over an extended time period and offered to people when they are most likely to be receptive.

Solution 12: Provide access to prompt and flexible support

- 1. Work with the Chain of Command to protect the time that is allocated to transition.** Serving personnel are allocated a senior member of the military to support and protect their resettlement time; some may be able to facilitate leavers' location of their final posting, or to increase the serving personnel's time spent at home, with family, or planning their transition.
- 2. Communicate that support is not only for those at crisis point** and should be sought at first recognition of signs of need.
- 3. Extend the amount of time that support is available.** This could include making resettlement grants and learning credits accessible after leaving, timely signposting to the support available pre and post-transition, and regular check-ins and access to follow-up support following discharge.
- 4. Work with employers** to design schemes that offer greater flexibility particularly regarding start dates for those leaving the Armed Forces.

Summary of recommendations

This report contains a wealth of findings, and subsequent recommendations, to help families and serving personnel successfully transition from military to civilian life. The findings from the four EAST chapters contain 40 individual recommendations, focussing on solutions to specific behaviours. However, these should not be viewed in isolation, as this risks isolating recommendations by a single barrier to behaviour change, when there may be multiple barriers at play. We have therefore amalgamated our 40 solutions into four overarching themes, which each include 2-3 solutions across different themes. We believe these solutions, when combined, would be the most impactful for families and their serving person transitioning out of the Armed Forces. Our solutions include both the principles to be applied across support offered and ideas for new support provisions.

1. Reduce information and choice overload

- a. Break transition down into smaller and more manageable steps to achieve long-term goals. Facilitate early preparation and track progress by providing timely tips and reminders.
- b. Inform families about what steps they need to complete, how long each of these take and which need to be considered early-on, to ensure families can flexibly respond to unexpected events.
- c. Make certain tasks the default to facilitate long-term engagement, e.g. auto-enrol serving personnel and/or their families into a scheme that transfers a % of their monthly salary into a savings pot or a 'civilian transition fund' unless they opt-out.

2. Involve the family in transition support

- a. Change the way information is delivered to families. This could range from setting up a direct channel of communication with families, or by tapping into existing channels, either by forwarding emails sent to serving personnel or by using meaningful and credible messengers, e.g. the Chain of Command personally inviting families to turn-up to transition events.
- b. Make the message salient by using inclusive language and providing information that is tailored to the needs of families, e.g. create a system where serving personnel and families select the topics that are applicable to them and only receive filtered advice and support.
- c. Ensure transition support is logistically feasible for families, e.g. facilitate travel and child-care arrangements, and provide alternatives if it is not possible for families to attend in person, e.g. through webinars.

3. Tap into social networks

- a. Ask serving personnel to nominate a family member to be their “*transition supporter*” to receive regular texts regarding transition, tips on what to do and events they can attend to facilitate conversations.
- b. Pair families due to leave the Armed Forces with those who have already left, e.g. use a digital platform to enable conversations between “*buddy families*”.
- c. Ask serving personnel and families who make use of support services to reach out to other people in their own military networks to encourage them to also engage.

4. Continue support after transition

- a. Extend the amount of time that support is available by making resettlement grants and learning credits accessible after leaving (or raise awareness of extended availability); particularly for those who are not able to access them at the time in which these are available.
- b. Inform leavers on what support is available post-transition and follow-up with them at regular check-ins, e.g. after six or 12 months, to ask how they are doing and sign-post them to additional support if needed.

These ideas were brought to a group of experts in a workshop, to assess their feasibility and impact. The next section details the insights from the solution workshop.

Feasibility and impact

To get an initial sense of whether these solutions are feasible to implement, or likely to have a meaningful impact, we ran a workshop with a range of stakeholders to assess the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing each component of the four solutions. Participants scored each of the 11 components based on how feasible they were to implement, and the potential impact they could make. We had a loose threshold in mind for eliminating components of solutions: each had to score a minimum of 10/20 with a minimum of 5/10 for the Impact component of the rating.

All of the components (and the solutions overall) passed this threshold, meaning none were eliminated, and all should be considered for implementation. Whilst an overall high score is important, if it is made up of high impact and relatively lower feasibility, it may still be important to pursue. Some of these recommendations are likely to be hard to implement but worthwhile.

We are indebted to the workshop attendees and note that although this section represents their views, not all views may have been captured here and we did not have representatives from all relevant sectors at the workshop. The feasibility and impact scores are therefore not definitive scores. The full table of solutions and their scores can be found at Appendix 2.

For the remainder of this section we discuss general considerations and then specific challenges and opportunities for each solution in turn, as identified by workshop participants. These comprise the beginning of a conversation around implementing and trialling these solutions, which would form the second phase of this project. If commissioned for this second phase, each issue outlined below, as well as others, would be analysed in greater depth.

General implementation considerations

Opportunities	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solutions could be recommended in the new transition policy due in spring 2019. 2. Plans are afoot to recruit an organisation to deliver through-career transition information. It would be a single point of contact for help and support. This could be an 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Units would need to take responsibility for some of these activities. 2. It could be difficult for a single Service to deliver, and would need tri-service support. 3. There may be a risk of increasing dependency on the military, so interventions need to ensure they

<p>organisation to help implement the solutions.</p> <p>3. Interventions around planning could target life events, such as marriage, the birth of a new child, or a new posting.</p>	<p>are focussed on upskilling families and serving personnel.</p> <p>4. Data protection, consent and GDPR would need to be factored in.</p>
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1. Reduce information and choice overload

Opportunities	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions could be incorporated into the Family Transition Guide. HARDFACTS could be used as a diagnostic tool to ascertain the transition strengths and weaknesses of a family and serving person. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hard to reach families will be challenging, especially given the consent required to contact families and keep their records. The Joint Personnel Administration's (JPA) consent process would need to be altered.

2. Involve family in transition

Opportunities	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Online tools are a key mechanism to facilitate family engagement. New JPA system could auto enrol an email address for families. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking permission to contact will be challenging.

3. Tap into social networks

Opportunities	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> SSAFA transition mentoring scheme could be combined or built upon. Could harness social media to publish and sign post to the service, e.g. Mumsnet, LinkedIn. Peer support resonates well with the existing culture within the Armed Forces (see p. 34). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Families during transition may be too busy to interact with others. The matching process may be difficult, as a serving person's rank already affects behaviour. Encouraging sign-ups could be challenging, language of 'supporter' would need to be carefully considered and user-tested.

4. Continue to support after transition

Opportunities	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services already hold contact details for many veterans. 2. Learning credits available already – limited awareness they last for 5 years. 3. Veteran’s Gateway UK is trialling an outbound calling service for ex-Service personnel, based on the US Marine Corps model. This could be extended to include family members by asking Service personnel to refer them to the service. 4. Tag communication onto pension’s letters that are sent out annually. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allowing credits and resettlement grants to be carried over to partners may have tax implications. 2. Chain of Command may de-prioritise the need for serving personnel to start preparing for transition whilst they are still serving, if they know that they will be able to access support later on. 3. Could be perceived as patronising or may be hindered by help-seeking stigma.

These implementation factors are important to consider, acting as a starting point for developing these solutions into policy. We will continue to work closely with stakeholders from the MOD, the tri-services and third sector to ensure any ideas taken forward are practical and impactful.

Conclusion

Transitioning from military to civilian life is challenging, as serving personnel and their families juggle several significant life events concurrently. Although the majority of military families make this change successfully, modifying the current systems and processes could make for even better transition success. Increasing engagement of both families and serving personnel with the transition process is therefore essential when designing policies to improve outcomes.

In this report we have highlighted a range of directions for how to improve structures and increase families' and serving personnel's engagement with support services. A more behavioural, human-centred approach is advised: one that factors in the behavioural barriers families and serving personnel face when undertaking such a significant lifestyle change. From our research, we recommend four key mechanisms to achieve this:

- 1. Reduce information and choice overload**
- 2. Involve family in transition support**
- 3. Tap into social networks**
- 4. Continue support after transition**

We believe that designing behaviourally informed systems, that better consider the factors that underpin many families' and serving personnel's experience of transition, will have a positive impact across all of the sub-dimensions of transition - housing, employment, finance, health and wellbeing. In this instance, taking a behavioural approach is a preventative one – it empowers families and serving personnel with the knowledge of when and how to prepare for transition.

However, contextual influences on people's behaviour are significant and often difficult to predict. Serving personnel and families will differ on a number of dimensions ranging from Service, demographics, rank, experience and skills. It is therefore important to conduct robust evaluations of any policy changes to establish which interventions are most effective in supporting families and serving personnel in the process of transition.

Our recommendations aim to help the family and serving person to understand their own transition context, engage in time-appropriate planning and support, encourage openness and sharing of their expertise, and ensure their sacrifice for their country is duly recognised after they leave the military. We believe this is an asset-based model of support which builds on families' strengths to help them recognise when weakness may be at play and the strengths and resources they have to draw on.

Glossary of terms

Behavioural science terms

Term	Definition
Anchoring	Our tendency to favour an initial piece of information over subsequent information, and use it to inform our decision making and judgements.
Cognitive load	The amount of cognitive resources or mental effort required for completing a task.
Cognitive resources	The capacity to engage in mental processes, such as using working memory, focusing attention and ignoring distraction. Cognitive resources allow us to reason, to problem-solve, to learn new ideas, to make creative leaps and to resist our immediate impulses.
EAST	'Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely': these are the Behavioural Insights Team's four principles for encouraging behaviour change.
Friction costs	Seemingly irrelevant details that impose a small amount of friction but disproportionately discourage action.
Gamification	The application of game design elements in a non-gaming context (e.g. point scoring, competition with others).
Intention-action gap	The difference between people's values, attitudes and intentions and how they actually behave.
In-group bias	The tendency to favour one's own group, its members, its characteristics, and its products, particularly in reference to other groups. The favouring of the in-group tends to be more pronounced than the rejection of out-group. Both tendencies become more pronounced during periods of intergroup contact.

Messenger and the messenger effect	The tendency to give different weight to information depending on who is communicating it.
Present bias	The tendency to place greater value on immediate rewards and discount those in the future.
Social identity	We identify ourselves in relation to the social groups to which we belong, and form a social identity based on the goals and achievements of such groups. This social identity contributes to our understanding of who we are and can have a strong impact on our self-esteem and behaviour.
Social networks	We are embedded in a network of social relationships, and those we come into contact with both shape our actions and enable the spreading of information.
Social norms	The rules outlining what is deemed acceptable in a particular group or society.
Stereotype threat	Occurs when an individual's cognitive resources are consumed by dealing with a negative stereotype about a social group they belong to, instead of being dedicated to performing a task.
Values Affirmation	Participants are encouraged to reflect on the values that are important to them. This is thought to subsequently make them more open to different ideas.

Military terms

For the purposes of this report, and in keeping with definitions in previous reports by Forces in Mind Trust, various terms throughout have been defined as follows:

Term	Definition
Armed Forces	The British Armed Forces, also known as Her Majesty's Armed Forces, are the military Services responsible for the defence of the United Kingdom, its overseas territories and the Crown dependencies. They also promote Britain's wider interests, support international peacekeeping efforts and provide humanitarian aid.
Family	Married or cohabiting couples and their children/dependents (rather than extended family), unless a family specifically identifies other relationships, which it considers within the definition.
Reserves	The Volunteer Reserves are the British Armed Forces voluntary and part-time military reserve force. The Volunteer Reserves consists of civilian volunteers who routinely undergo training and military operations alongside the Regular military.
HARDFACTS	The Armed Forces transition monitoring and assessment tool.
HIVE	An Armed Forces support service providing information for serving people and their families on topics including childcare, relocation, employment, and information about the local area.
Joint Personnel Administration (JPA)	The intranet-based personnel administration system used by the British Armed Forces.
MOD	Ministry of Defence
Other Ranks	Other ranks are personnel in the Royal Marines, British Army and Royal Air Force that do not have a commission and they do not hold positions of high command. However, separate tiers of authority - warrant officer (WO) and non-commissioned officer (NCO) - exist within their rank structure.
Officer Ranks	Officers are at the top of the hierarchy. Their ranks indicate that they hold positions of authority, granted through a commission - a formal document of appointment signed by the monarch.

Partner	The long-term partner of a serving person, whether married or not.
Resettlement	The formal processes and procedures by which transition is managed, and the formal support provided to Service leavers during transition. It starts with the activation of the Resettlement process and continues until the end of Resettlement provision. Resettlement provision can be adapted for those who have suffered injury or illness, and specific pathways exist to manage their conditions and this process.
Transition	The period in which Service leavers and their families reintegrate into civilian life from the Armed Forces. Although flexible, the transition period is taken to start at the point in which serving person start their resettlement process and then continue, as explained above, for three years from discharge.
Tri-service	A description of the three military Services, the Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force.

Appendix 1

Research design

This qualitative research builds upon two previous stages of our research, which informed the current research questions and methodological approach.

Stage 1) Scoping phase: we conducted workshops and meetings with specialists from charities, the Ministry of Defence and from within the Transition teams within the Armed Forces. These helped us understand how they conceptualised transition, and the challenges serving personnel and their families faced.

Stage 2) Literature review of the evidence that related to how serving personnel and their families transition out of the Armed Forces, as well as the behavioural barriers to accessing support services (both in the Armed Forces and in other settings). This helped us understand the gaps in the evidence.

After stages one and two, we devised the qualitative research plan, building on expertise from academia and those working in transition.

Stage 3) This research is a qualitative exploration of the serving personnel and families experiences of transitioning from the Armed Forces. We conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with families and serving personnel, aiming to better understand the motivations, obstacles and facilitators associated with engagement with support services during this period.

Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with family members of serving personnel planning to leave the Armed Forces within the next 2 years, and veterans who had transitioned from the Armed Forces in the last 5 years. Interviews took place via the participant's chosen method (either face to face or over the phone), and lasted an average of 35 minutes. The interview covered families' experiences of all practical and social (foreseen and experienced) preparations and implications to transitioning; see the full interview topic guides in Appendix 1. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to structure and guide the discussion in order to explore the research questions (see Box 1), whilst remaining open to the discussion of new emerging topics and insights into families' experiences of transition from the Armed Forces.

Purposive sampling

A purposive sampling approach was utilised to recruit a wide range of families diverse across the following criteria:

1. **Military branch:** British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force
2. **Housing:** on-base military housing, off-base military housing, and private housing
3. **Duration of military service:** from those approaching/at the end of their first contract to those with over twenty years of service
4. **Transition stage:** time remaining until contract expiration, and time since contract expiration
5. **Location:** rural versus urban locations both on and off base
6. **Families:** with or without children, single parents
7. **Other criteria:** socio-economic status, educational qualifications, military base size

Purposive sampling a diverse range of families to interview ensured detailed exploration of the differences in families' perceptions and experiences transitioning from the Armed Forces. The total sample consisted of 53 interview participants (45 females and 8 males). 40 were family members and 13 were serving personnel or veterans (7 of whom also had a serving/veteran partner). At the time of the interview, 27 families were pre-transition and 30 families were post-transition. 13 were in the Royal Navy (1 submariner and 2 Royal Marines), 27 families served in the British Army, 11 in the Royal Air Force and a minority (2 families) had served across two different military branches. See the table below for the full list of sample participant information).

Sample characteristics and demographic information

Alias	Relation	Transition	Service	Gender
FM02	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM05	Partner	Pre	Royal Navy	F
FM06	Veteran	Post	British Army	M
FM07	Veteran	Post	Royal Air Force	F
FM13	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM14	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM15	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM17	Parent	Post	British Army	F
FM19	Veteran & partner	Post	Royal Air Force	F
FM21	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM22	Veteran & partner	Post	British Army	M

FM23	Partner	Post	Royal Air Force	F
FM25	Child	Post	British Army	F
FM26	Parent	Post	British Army	F
FM29	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM30	Veteran	Post	Royal Navy/Royal Air Force	M
FM31	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM33	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM35	Partner	Post	Royal Navy	F
FM37	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM38	Partner	Pre	Royal Navy	F
FM39	Veteran & partner	Pre	Royal Navy	M
FM40	Partner	Pre	Royal Navy	F
FM42	Partner	Post	Royal Navy	F
FM43	Partner	Pre	British Army	F
FM44	Partner	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM47	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM50	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM51	Partner	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM54	Serving & partner	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM55	Partner	Pre	British Army	F
FM63	Partner	Pre	British Army	F
FM65	Partner	Post	Royal Air Force	F
FM70	Serving & partner	Pre	British Army/Royal Air Force	F
FM72	Serving	Pre	Royal Navy	M
FM76	Serving	Pre	Royal Marines	M
FM80	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM82	Partner	Post	Royal Navy	F
FM84	Serving	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM85	Partner	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM86	Veteran & partner	Post	Royal Air Force	F
FM87	Partner	Pre	Royal Marines	F
FM88	Partner	Pre	Royal Navy	F
FM90	Partner	Pre	Royal Air Force	F
FM91	Partner	Pre	British Army	F

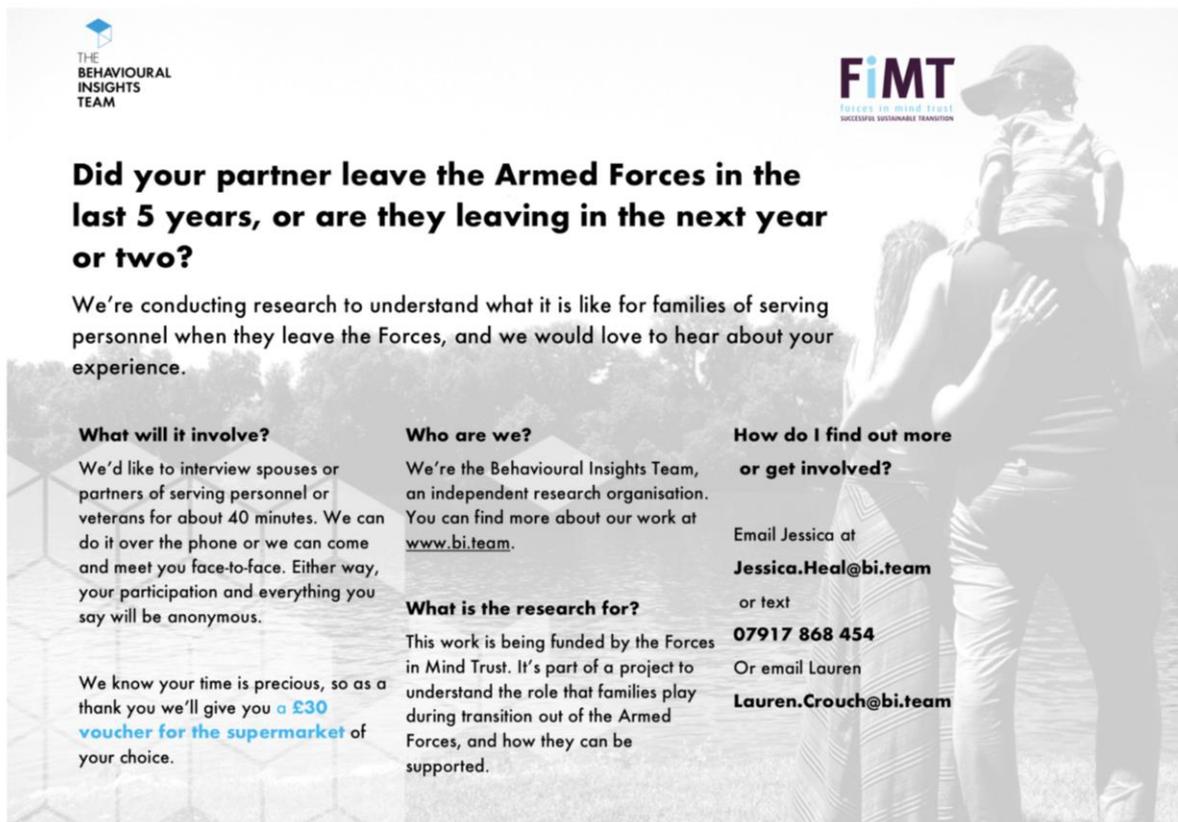
FM92	Partner	Pre	British Army	M
FM94	Partner	Post	Royal Marines	F
FM95	Partner	Pre	British Army	F
FM96	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM98	Partner	Post	British Army	F
FM99	Veteran & partner	Post	British Army	M
FM100	Partner	Pre	Royal Navy	F
FM101	Partner	Pre	British Army	F

Recruitment

Recruitment methods through which families were purposefully sampled and invited to take part in the research included:

1. **Snowball recruitment** through personal connections with Armed Forces families, and interview participants sharing the research with their Armed Forces networks
2. **Social media outreach** via Facebook, Behavioural Insights Team website, Twitter
3. **Charity organisations**
4. **Non-charity organisations**
5. **Magazine advertisement:** ½ page advert published in Pathfinder magazine (overleaf)

The research advertisement below was shared by social media platforms, charity organisations, and advertised in Pathfinder magazine, to disseminate the study information to Armed Forces' families across the UK.



THE BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS TEAM

FiMT
Forces in Mind Trust
SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION

Did your partner leave the Armed Forces in the last 5 years, or are they leaving in the next year or two?

We're conducting research to understand what it is like for families of serving personnel when they leave the Forces, and we would love to hear about your experience.

What will it involve?
We'd like to interview spouses or partners of serving personnel or veterans for about 40 minutes. We can do it over the phone or we can come and meet you face-to-face. Either way, your participation and everything you say will be anonymous.

Who are we?
We're the Behavioural Insights Team, an independent research organisation. You can find more about our work at www.bi.team.

How do I find out more or get involved?
Email Jessica at **Jessica.Heal@bi.team** or text **07917 868 454**
Or email Lauren **Lauren.Crouch@bi.team**

We know your time is precious, so as a thank you we'll give you a **£30 voucher for the supermarket** of your choice.

What is the research for?
This work is being funded by the Forces in Mind Trust. It's part of a project to understand the role that families play during transition out of the Armed Forces, and how they can be supported.

Ethics

Informed consent

Written informed consent was provided by participants before conducting the interviews. Verbal consent to record the interview was also obtained over the phone before commencing. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and reminded that they could withdraw their participation from the study at any time, without needing to give a reason. Families that detailed present difficult or distressing experiences during their interviews were offered signposting to relevant support services via email following the interview.

Reimbursement

Participants were offered a £30 supermarket or retail voucher for their family to say thank you for their participation in the research. One research participant requested to donate the £30 value to an Armed Forces charity, instead of receiving a food voucher. Participants' travel expenses (train tickets and petrol costs) were also pre-purchased or offered to be reimbursed to participants who travelled to face-to-face interviews.

Data storage

All signed consent forms and interview recordings were stored on BIT's secure Google Drive, and immediately deleted from the recording device upon successful upload. All interview recordings were deleted from the drive within 6 months of successful transcription. All participant details were saved in a password-protected restricted access sampling hive on BIT's secure Google Drive. Participants were assigned anonymous IDs and their names removed, to create an anonymous final sample hive.

Analysis

Transcription

All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and anonymised at the point of transcription. Anonymisation ensured all identifiable information from the interviews was removed, including names of people, locations, and schools. All transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative coding programme Dedoose, to make it possible to conduct later thematic analysis on the interview data.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is an inductive method used for organising patterns in qualitative data, to coherently represent the meaning underpinning participants' perceptions and experiences, relevant to the subject matter being studied.²² Line by line coding was conducted by 4 BIT researchers on all interview transcripts in Dedoose. This process included attributing codes with definitive labels to each line or paragraph that accurately represented participants' responses. Codes were iteratively refined and revised, and the coding framework restructured, in order to generate the themes and sub-themes that are documented in this report. For each transcript that was thematically analysed, researchers recorded a written summary of the family's experience in a coding journal that also detailed key questions to cover with families in forthcoming interviews. The immersive process of thematic analysis enhanced the depth of our understanding of families' experiences across different contexts.

Appendix 2

Table of solutions with impact and feasibility scores from workshops

Component	Solution description	Impact /10	Feasibility /10	Total /20
Reduce information and choice overload				
1a	Break transition down into smaller steps and provide timely tips and reminders.	7	8	15
1b	Inform families about what steps they need to complete, how long each of these take and when to start considering them.	7	7	14
1c	Auto-enrol serving personnel into a scheme that transfers a % of their monthly salary into a savings 'civilian transition fund'.	10	5	15
Involve family in transition support				
2a	Communicate with families directly, or encourage forwarding of information by credible messengers such as superiors.	9	4	13
2b	Use inclusive language and enabled families and serving personnel to filter advice and select topics applicable to them.	7	9	16
2c	Improve logistics to transition events, e.g. facilitate travel and child-care arrangements or develop online materials.	7	7	14
Tap into social networks				
3a	Ask serving personnel a " <i>transition supporter</i> " to receive regular texts regarding transition, tips and events to on what to facilitate conversations.	8	7.5	15.5
3b	Pair families due to leave the Armed Forces with those who have already left, e.g. use a digital platform to enable conversations.	7	6	13
3c	Ask serving personnel and families who use support services to reach out to other in their own military networks to encourage them to also turn-up.	6	7	13

Continue support after transition				
4a	Extend the amount of time that grants, learning credits and support are available after leaving; particularly for those who missed out.	5	6	11
4b	Follow-up with them at regular check-ins, e.g. after 6 or 12 months and signpost them to additional support if needed.	9	8	17

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