

Employing Female Service Leavers

What is a ‘Service leaver’?

Service leavers are often called ‘veterans’. When applied to the Armed Forces, a ‘Service leaver’ or ‘veteran’ simply means anyone who has served in the Armed Forces. Some Service leavers are still in their twenties, having served for just a few years, while others might have up to 30 years’ experience. A Service leaver will have served in the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Marines or Royal Air Force. When they have served their time in the Armed Forces, most Service leavers want to embark on a second career in the civilian labour market.

Serving in the Armed Forces is traditionally still associated with men, but around ten per cent of those who leave the Services every year are female.

Why is it a good idea to employ female Service leavers?

During their time in the Armed Forces, Service leavers will have acquired skills, experience and qualifications. Employers identify a lot of good reasons why they bring benefits to the organisation. Female Service leavers, in addition, are said by employers to have particularly strong organisation and forward planning skills, and to be notably good at interpersonal relations.



Here are some of the things that employers of Service leavers say:

'The qualities that make up a good Service person can add to any organisation; Service leavers are motivated and capable.'

'I'm a passionate advocate. I'll go to any organisation to talk about this.'

'There are a lot of benefits and very, very little downside.'

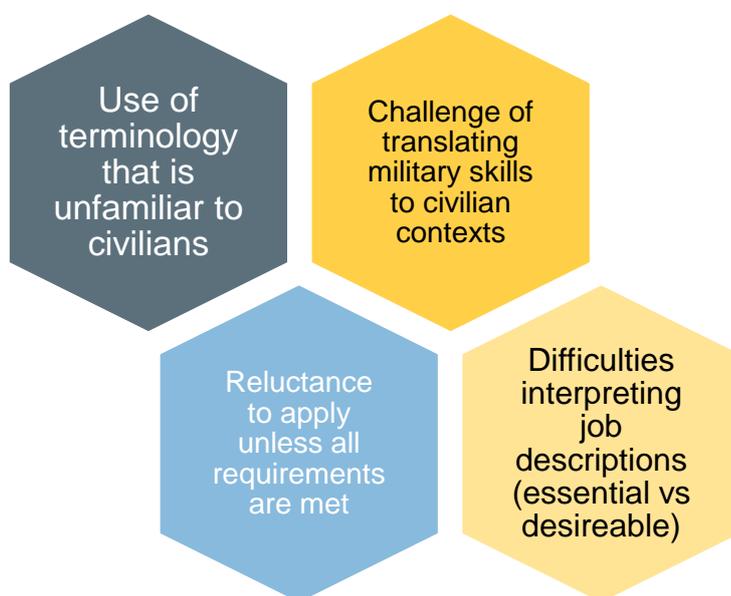
The workforce is our biggest asset, and Service leavers have skills that are invaluable ... We need a first class workforce, and employing them helps us to ensure our future pipeline.'

'Female Service leavers are particularly suited to the way that we are going now as an organisation.'

What might get in the way?

There are two main barriers to Service leavers when they attempt to get work in the civilian labour market.

Firstly, they can find it hard to describe their skills and experience in a way that makes sense to civilian employers. Female Service leavers are at a particular disadvantage here: the evidence shows that women in general tend not to put themselves forward for a job opportunity unless they can tick every box, while men are more likely to have a go at applying, even if they only meet some of the requirements. Women who have served in the Armed Forces describe this as a 'double whammy' that gets in the way of success.



Secondly, there are a lot of misconceptions about Service leavers that might dissuade employers from giving them a chance.

Myth

Those who've served in the Armed Forces will be uncomfortable in a less structured environment.

Reality

Employers of Service leavers say that they are actually comfortable with flexibility and have a wealth of soft skills around collaboration and leadership.

Myth

Service leavers are likely to suffer from mental health problems.

Reality

While it is true that serving in the Armed Forces can expose service personnel to difficult situations that may have a lasting impact, employers of veterans say their sickness absence levels are no different from those of civilian employees, and that they usually have higher than average levels of resilience.

Myth

People expect female Service leavers to be 'macho' in their behaviour.

Reality

Female Service leavers have learnt how to be assertive in the Armed Forces, but in an effective rather than an aggressive way, which is beneficial to employers.

Maximising the benefits

The reasons why Service leavers are attracted to particular employers are no different from those put forward by any other employee. They appreciate a strong brand and a good reputation; good training, development and career opportunities; being able to use their skills; and a welcoming, friendly culture. Female Service leavers with children, unsurprisingly, also appreciate flexible working hours, a convenient location, and stability.

Employers of female Service leavers offer advice to organisations that would like to be more 'Forces-friendly':

- Examine any barriers to entry.
 - Do not, for example, say that experience in the sector or with particular products is essential if, in fact, it is the skills and attributes of the individual that are far more important. Gaps in knowledge can be easily plugged when you employ the right person.
 - Try to identify all applications and CVs from Service leavers, and take a second look at them.
 - Do not assume that female Service leavers will want to do a job that is similar to their role in the Armed Forces – many are looking for a change.

- Advocate your organisation as a great place to work for people from all backgrounds.
- Emphasise your organisation's values and ethics; people who have served their country respond well to positive values and good ethical practice.
- Make new employees who are Service leavers feel welcome, for example by giving them a buddy or mentor who is familiar with the Armed Forces, and ensuring their new line manager understands their background.
- If you are truly committed, make it known that you are a Forces-friendly employer, for example in job adverts, on your website and to the local press. This may require some investment, but the benefits will far outweigh the cost.
 - Sign the Armed Forces Covenant, and gain recognition for your efforts.
 - Engage with the Ministry of Defence's Careers Transition Partnership (CTP), which helps ex-Service people to find a new civilian career or job and helps employers to recruit the best.
 - An internet search should help you to find a local military network that your organisation could join. This will put you in touch with other employers in the area that employ veterans.

Where to go for further advice

Information about the Armed Forces Covenant, including how you can gain recognition for your organisation via the Defence Employers Recognition Scheme, can be found here:

<https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/support-and-advice/businesses/>

Find out more about the Careers Transition Partnership, including how to contact the CTP, at

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/career-transition-partnership>.

Further details about Forces in Mind Trust, which commissioned the research that forms the basis of this briefing, can be found on the website <https://www.fim-trust.org/>

Research into the employment of female Service leavers

This employer briefing is based on evidence. The Forces in Mind Trust commissioned Cranfield University and the Institute for Employment Studies to carry out research into the employment outcomes of female Service leavers, due to concerns that women who leave the Armed Forces might not do as well in the civilian labour market as male veterans.

The research was carried out in 2018 and comprised an evidence review, a labour market review, interviews with employers, and a survey of female Service leavers followed by interviews with a sample of survey participants.

