



# Improving Service Family Engagement with the Transition to Civilian Life: Insights and Behaviour Change Interventions

Final report

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Produced for:  
**Forces in Mind Trust**

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Produced by:  
**Thinks Insight & Strategy**

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# Foreword - Forces in Mind Trust

**Most Service families make a successful transition to civilian life with their lives having been enriched by service.** However, for some Service partners and their families, the transition journey is more challenging and, even where transition is ultimately successful, it's not necessarily straightforward or easy. While support is available to help partners to prepare for life after service, it does not always reach those who would benefit most. Barriers such as difficulty accessing support, reliance on second-hand information from the serving person, information overload, technical language and limited awareness of what support exists can all play a role. Competing priorities, such as work, childcare and the demands of daily life, can also mean that transition planning is deprioritised.

Engagement with transition preparation and support is not a new challenge. It is one that we at FiMT, alongside others, have been grappling with for some time. In response, we decided to take a different approach and explore the often identified issue of poor communication with Service families. We commissioned Thinks Insight & Strategy to explore and unpick the underlying reasons why some Service partners and their families leave the Armed Forces unprepared for civilian life. Using behavioural insights, this work sought to deepen our understanding of how engagement with transition support can be improved in meaningful and practical ways.

This project sits at the heart of our work, identifying, testing and developing new approaches to long-standing and complex challenges to improve the experience of transition for Service families. Throughout the research, the team worked closely with Service families and service providers to co-create interventions that reflect the realities of Armed Forces life, as well as the behavioural and structural factors that can limit engagement with support. The resulting interventions are encouraging, offering intuitive and practical opportunities that don't require an overhaul of support. Instead, they demonstrate how practical adjustments toward better communication and delivery of what already exists can make a real difference. By ensuring support feels accessible, coherent and, most importantly, relevant to the lives of Armed Forces families, there is an opportunity to improve transition outcomes for all, and most especially for those who are least likely to engage.

As this report makes clear, however, no single intervention will be sufficient on its own. Improving engagement with transition support and encouraging transition preparation will require a coordinated package of interventions, alongside wider systems-level changes that recognise the vital role families play and fully empower them to thrive both during and after service. This project has defined the issue, identified metrics for what good would look like, co-created a range of problem-solving options and market-tested their appeal. The question now is: do we collectively have the courage to innovate and take the next step?

**Michelle Alston** - Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

# Foreword - Ministry of Defence

**Supporting our Armed Forces community as they transition to civilian life is one of the most important responsibilities we hold within Defence.** For most families this journey is positive, but as this report makes clear, too many still find themselves navigating a complex landscape of services at a moment when clarity, confidence and timely support matter most. We have long known that families are central to a successful transition; this research provides compelling evidence of just how vital their role is and how much more effectively the system can work for them.

This report, commissioned by Forces in Mind Trust and delivered by Thinks Insight & Strategy, provides a rich and nuanced understanding of what partners and families experience as they approach transition. Crucially, it highlights that the challenge is not the absence of support, but the difficulty many families face in accessing and engaging with it. Information can feel overwhelming, fragmented or overly tailored to serving personnel, leaving partners without a clear route to the help that is available to them.

What sets this work apart is its methodology. The study actively involved service partners at each stage, listened to their experiences, tested ideas with them, and shaped solutions together. The research offers interventions that feel relevant, practical and grounded in the realities of Service life. The proposed tools, including the *My Forces Journey* transition map, the AI enabled *VICKY* chatbot, and partner focused career initiatives, speak directly to the issues families told us matter most: simplicity, personal relevance, independence, and support that is both timely and trustworthy.

The findings also reinforce an important truth: effective transition support must be a shared endeavour. It requires collaboration across Defence, other government departments, the charitable sector and employers and above all, a commitment to designing services with families, not simply on their behalf. This research demonstrates that when we take that approach, the quality, usability and impact of support improves markedly.

We are grateful to Forces in Mind Trust, to Thinks Insight & Strategy, and above all to the Serving partners and families who contributed so openly and constructively to this work. Their voices and lived experience remain essential in shaping the policies and services we provide. This report offers valuable insights to inform that ongoing effort, and we look forward to continued collaboration with colleagues across government and the Armed Forces community as we consider how to take this work forward.

**Zoe Bishop and Sarah Houghton** - Directors of Armed Forces People Policy, Ministry of Defence

# Executive Summary

*This report explores how military-to-civilian transition support can be better achieved and communicated to meet the needs of service partners and families, focusing on individual, social, and systems-level behaviour change opportunities.*

**Partners and families play a critical role in enabling successful transitions, yet are often insufficiently recognised or supported within existing systems.**

Despite a wide range of high-quality transition-related support being available, many service families struggle to access and engage with it effectively. Barriers include difficulty knowing where to start, information overload, and the use of technical or military-specific language that feels inaccessible to partners. Support is often designed primarily for serving personnel, with limited tailoring or no access for partners, reinforcing reliance on the serving person and discouraging independent engagement. As a result, support is frequently accessed too late and only in response to immediate pressures.

**There are clear opportunities to improve transition support by increasing independence, access, and peer-led delivery.**

Approaches to early transition planning vary widely. Help-seeking is typically reactive rather than proactive. When navigating transition support, partners most often turn to peers - friends and family in similar situations - who “get them” and who can offer trusted, experience-based guidance. Our work with 40 service partners identifies **three opportunities** to shift the focus from creating more support to enabling families to engage with support at the right time, in the right way:

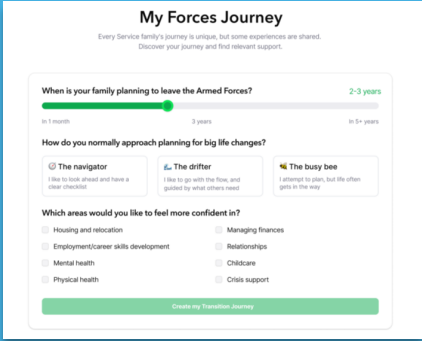
- **Increase independence for service partners** - adapt existing provision, provide access to existing systems where appropriate, or develop new support specifically for partners. Enable service partners to access information and support directly rather than via the serving person.
- **Improve access to existing support** - simplify pathways, reduce complexity through personalisation, and reframe information so service families can more easily navigate and benefit from what already exists.
- **Leverage peer networks proactively** - harness trusted peer relationships and informal networks as credible channels for signposting support earlier and more consistently, while helping to overcome communication barriers.

**Co-created behaviour change interventions which build on these opportunities show strong potential to improve transition outcomes for service families.**

**Three interventions** show particular promise in improving transition outcomes, based on iterative development and user testing with service families:

- **Transition journey map** - a clear, accessible visualisation of the transition journey that supports earlier conversations, shared understanding, and proactive planning by providing a personalised journey map in response to user input.

### Transition Journey Map (My Forces Journey)



**Overview**

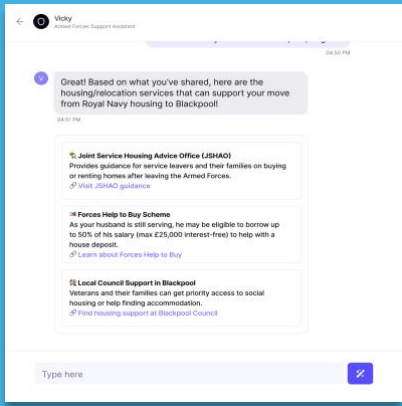
A personalised online tool that provides a progress map tailored to families' transition journeys, highlighting key stages and milestones to achieve before transitioning, and signposting to services for relevant support.

**User testing finding**

The tool provides a holistic one-stop shop that makes it easier for service families to have conversations about transition earlier, and to find tailored support,

- **AI-enabled chatbot** - an interactive, personalised tool that helps partners identify relevant support quickly and confidently, tailored to their circumstances based on natural conversation.

### VICKY, the Armed Forces Chatbot



**Overview**

An AI-enabled online chatbot that users can interact with to receive guidance and information about relevant support services that are unique to their needs.

**User testing finding**

The chatbot feels personal and tailored to individual needs, and is easier to navigate compared to current gov.uk resources. 24/7 availability is valuable, but there is also a need for empathetic human support when it comes to sensitive topics.

- **Partner-focused careers events** - dedicated events for service partners, or the existing events with communications rebranded to be more inclusive, combining career support with opportunities to build social networks and peer connections.

## Partners' career fair



### Overview

Career events or services that help partners access potential employers, find job opportunities, and connect with people in similar situations.

### User testing finding

Service partners value having an event just for them, as it helps them feel their unique needs are supported. They appreciate opportunities to network with others with similar experiences, and to make social connections.

These interventions are practical, adaptable, and designed to complement rather than replace existing provision.

### **Deliberative co-creation has resulted in interventions that families recognise as relevant and usable, and that they feel a sense of ownership over.**

A key implication of this work is the importance of moving from designing *for* families to designing *with* them. Sustained involvement of service partners throughout the research and development process surfaced critical barriers, key moments that matter during transition, and points where existing support feels fragmented or hard to navigate. This participatory approach not only improves the quality and feasibility of solutions but also strengthens confidence and buy-in ahead of implementation—an essential factor for successful delivery at scale.

### **Impact can be maximised through layered delivery, partnership working, and continued system-level change.**

These interventions are not intended to be delivered in isolation. Their impact will be maximised when they are layered together and adapted in partnership with service delivery organisations, including charities and Armed Forces stakeholders. Whilst these targeted interventions can drive meaningful behaviour change, the research also highlights the need for wider systems change driven by political and Armed Forces leaders and the whole Armed Forces community. Transition support must be designed with service families at its heart, with fewer access barriers and stronger alignment with existing social structures, communities, and trusted channels.

The next phase of this work is to further refine, test, and implement these promising interventions in collaboration with delivery partners, while continuing to advocate for systemic change that better recognises and supports service partners throughout transition.

# Main report

# 1. Background and objectives

## Forces in Mind Trust

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) is a National Lottery Community Fund-endowed, spend-out charitable trust dedicated to strengthening the evidence base that informs policy and service delivery for ex-service personnel and their families, enabling successful transitions to civilian life. FiMT supports high-quality research and evidence-led initiatives to improve outcomes for the Armed Forces community, particularly those who struggle the most. Guided by values of collaboration, empathy, rigorous use of evidence, accessibility, and intelligent innovation, FiMT works in partnership across the sector. Its research programme focuses on key transition-related challenges, including the role of families, veterans' mental health and wellbeing, mapping the transition journey, and improving information, advice and guidance systems.

*For a glossary of terms used throughout this report, see [Appendix 7.1](#)*

## Project background

While most individuals achieve the transition to civilian life smoothly, some face significant challenges. Although numerous support services are available, those who need them most do not always engage. Previous research has pointed to a wealth of potential reasons for disengagement, such as limited readiness, lack of awareness of available support, and an oversaturated support ecosystem<sup>1</sup>.

FiMT's initial hypothesis was that partners and families, including dependent children, experience the challenges of transition in distinct ways, shaped by systemic barriers rather than a lack of willingness to engage. Previous evidence suggested that awareness and understanding of transition-related support among families is often limited because information is primarily focused on the serving person, communicated in technical or military language, and not tailored to non-serving partners. These issues can be compounded by information overload, inaccessible communication channels, and a lack of direct engagement with partners, as well as limited recognition of families as individuals in their own right. As a result, partners and children may be underprepared for the impacts of transition, contributing to lower and later engagement with support, despite the importance of family involvement in successful outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

Effective communication is crucial to ensure that service leavers and their families can access the information and resources they need, yet evidence shows that many, particularly non-serving partners, do not receive, recognise, or engage with Armed Forces communications<sup>1</sup>, still less with transition-focused communications

## Project objectives

FiMT commissioned Thinks Insight & Strategy to conduct in-depth exploratory research with service families to explore barriers to engaging with transition support, and take a deliberative and co-creative approach to develop behavioural change interventions that facilitate earlier preparation for transition.

This research explores the following key research questions:

- What are the key behaviours and journey moments for serving families' successful transition?
- What barriers and opportunities help or hinder these key behaviours?
- What are the key support networks and services that service families interact with?
- What might behaviourally informed, creative interventions for service families look like?
- Which interventions are feasible and effective for future rollout?

*For a full list of detailed research questions and the methods used to answer each, see [Appendix 7.2](#)*

## Methods overview

We conducted this research in two phases including:

### **Phase one (Jan 2025- May 2025) Discovering the opportunities for intervention**

This involved:

- Rapid evidence review to collate existing evidence on service leavers and their families' experiences of transition, and opportunities for greater engagement in transition support.
- 60-minute-long online interviews with 6 Armed Forces stakeholders investigating what a successful transition looks like, key support services that are offered to service partners, why service partners are not engaging with support services and realizing opportunities for improved communications and better support.
- In-depth qualitative research with 40 service partners via an online ethnography platform, exploring their life as a service partner, their relationship with the Armed Forces, how they plan for life after service, and how they engage with support.
- Behavioural journey mapping<sup>1</sup> to summarise findings across Phase 1, outlining the stages of transition, key behaviours at each stage, and the range of factors that influence behaviour at each stage. This was discussed and refined with stakeholder input.

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<sup>1</sup> This journey map was initially informed by FiMT and Future Agenda's 2021 service personnel's journey - see [Appendix 7.3](#)- which was adapted for the present research, and iteratively built on throughout the project.

## **Phase two (Aug 2025 - Dec 2025): Developing and testing interventions through deliberative style co-creation and user testing**

This involved:

- Deliberative style intervention co-creation with 16 service partners and 10 stakeholders to produce ideas for transition-support interventions.
- Prioritisation of interventions, with input from FiMT and stakeholders, before behavioural design and prototyping of the top three interventions for testing.
- User testing with 42 new service partners to produce recommendations for intervention iteration and future rollout.

By taking a deliberative-style approach, we built a reciprocal, constructive relationship with serving partners, where their lived experiences informed our research questions and helped us build intervention ideas, and where seeing the ideas evolve into tangible solutions was meaningful and empowering for them.

*For the full methodology and more details on participant samples, see **Appendix 7.4** and **7.5***

## 2. Opportunities to improve transition support for service partners and families

### Insights from Phase 1's rapid evidence review

Our rapid evidence review brings together nine recent sources (dated from 2019 to 2025) that explore service leavers and their families' experiences of transition, and opportunities for greater engagement in transition support. Key findings include:

- **Service families experience a range of barriers preventing them from engaging with transition support, including:**
  - Difficulty accessing transition support, including limited direct communication from military organisations, physical inaccessibility of services, and reliance on second-hand information from the serving person.
  - Information overload and complexity due to technical or military-specific language, and a lack of tailored materials, can lead to disengagement.
  - Competing responsibilities, such as work, childcare, and household management, can limit families' time to engage, leaving the most vulnerable underprepared.
  - A lack of awareness of the support available specifically to them, including housing, employment, childcare, and wellbeing services.
- **A number of opportunities were identified that could enable service families to better engage in transition support, including the need for:**
  - Tailored communication with clear, accessible, and personalised messages for partners, parents, and other family members to reduce confusion and cognitive overload.
  - Early intervention - engaging families early in the transition process to help them prepare effectively and make informed decisions.
  - Integrated support, with collaborative approaches between military, civilian, and third-sector organisations ensure continuity across housing, employment, and wellbeing domains.
  - Family-specific services - such as education for children, housing stability, and childcare.
  - Cultural and behavioural interventions - encouraging help-seeking, addressing stigma, and leveraging social networks foster engagement and emotional support.
  - Public narrative shifts - promoting the contributions of service leavers can strengthen civilian-military integration and reduce societal bias.

This review also suggests that there are a number of **gaps in existing research**, which informed the development of the Phases 2 research. These gaps include:

- A limited understanding of what constitutes a “successful” transition from the family perspective, including emotional and mental well-being.
- An overall lack of clarity about specific behaviours families and service leavers should take at different stages of transition.
- Insufficient understanding of stakeholder roles and interactions across the transition system.
- Insufficient evidence on effective communication methods, channels, and the role of technology.

## Insights from Phase 1’s in-depth research with service families

In-depth qualitative research conducted in Phase 1 with 40 service partners via an online ethnography platform led to the following key findings:

- **Service partners demonstrate a strong sense of pride, purpose, and belonging within the service community.**
  - Given the transience and pressures of military family life, this sense of belonging and the emotional and practical support provided by service family networks are crucial.
  - Support should harness partners’ intrinsic motivations and values to encourage engagement, whilst proactively addressing key stress points at moments of greatest need.
- **Approaches to early transition planning vary depending on serving families’ circumstances and planning styles.**
  - Help-seeking is typically reactive rather than proactive, driven by immediate needs.
  - Support should therefore both encourage earlier transition planning and remain visible and responsive for partners who are ready to engage later.
- **When navigating transition support, service partners most often turn to friends and family in similar situations who “get them.”**
  - These relationships provide practical advice and emotional reassurance, helping to build confidence.
  - Informal channels such as Facebook groups and WhatsApp chats are widely used, and peer testimonials strongly influence decision-making and future engagement with services.

Insights from Phase 1 were analysed using the behavioural framework ISM<sup>2</sup> that explains behaviour as the result of interacting individual, social, and material influences. This model was chosen as it is appropriate for complex challenges like transition, where no

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<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government. (2013). Influencing behaviours: A technical guide to the ISM tool. The Scottish Government.

singular intervention could address all the elements associated with transitioning. ISM is also a good framework for encouraging the layering of interventions. The following table summarises key insights from Phase 1 and the behavioural opportunities that could be leveraged for each insight.

Individual level	
Insight from Phase 1 research	Behavioural opportunity to explore in Phase 2
<b>The serving person is not in a 'transition mindset' yet</b>	How might we bring the future closer, and help service families feel that <i>now is the right time to start transition planning</i> ?
<b>There is lack of urgency to engage with transition planning</b>	How might we help service families create <i>smaller, detailed transition action plans</i> , supporting them to feel well-prepared ahead of transition?
<b>Service families have knowledge gaps about existing support services that prevent them from engaging</b>	How might we make support services <i>easy to find when partners need support</i> ?
	How might we <i>boost service partners knowledge and skills</i> before a crisis/urgent need arises?
Social level	
<b>Service families look to other military partners for support - who can relate to their experiences</b>	How might we leverage proof to guide service families toward the right support, by making it visible, relatable, and <i>grounded in shared experience</i> ?
<b>The idea of transition itself is emotive - leaving the Forces feels like a loss of identity</b>	How might we reframe the transition from a loss of <i>identity to an opportunity for positive experiences</i> to reduce inertia around thinking about transition?
<b>Service partners are frustrated by their 'dependence' - with the serving person acting as a gateway to support</b>	How might we use social norms to promote more balanced, inclusive roles for both service person and their partners?
Material level	
<b>Communication often feels closed - and inaccessible to families</b>	How might we provide <i>access to open and trustworthy communication to address issues</i> when communication is disrupted?
<b>The language and terminology surrounding support can include complex military jargon</b>	How might we overcome cognitive overload whilst accessing transition support by making <i>content and process easy to understand and follow</i> ?

These opportunities were grouped into three **strategic opportunity areas** for intervention design. These three opportunity areas become the focus of our co-creative intervention design in Phase 2.

Three strategic opportunities:

### **1. Increasing independence for service partners**

Partners often feel like they are treated as co-dependent on the serving person, which can make accessing and engaging support challenging. There is an opportunity to adapt existing provision, provide access to systems where appropriate, or develop new support tailored specifically to partners, enabling them to better access and engage.

### **2. Improve access to existing support**

There is a wealth of support available from charities, organisations, and the Forces themselves, but various barriers prevent partners from fully engaging. There is an opportunity to simplify pathways, reduce complexity through personalisation, and better promote and communicate existing support services.

### **3. Leveraging the power of peer networks**

Armed Forces partners often rely on pre-existing support networks of friends, family, and other Armed Forces families who understand their unique situation. There is an opportunity to harness these trusted peer relationships and informal networks as credible channels for proactively delivering support, signposting services earlier and more consistently, and helping overcome communication barriers.

The second phase of this project builds on these opportunities, focusing explicitly on serving families to understand their experiences and identify ways to enhance communication, support, and family-inclusive approaches.

### 3. Behaviour change intervention co-creation

#### Phase 2's deliberative style co-creation workshop

Phase 2 aims to inform the development of new or optimised support services for service families. Deliberative-style co-creation is used to ensure these interventions are grounded in the lived experiences of service families and shaped collaboratively with the stakeholders responsible for delivering them.

A full-day, in-person workshop was conducted on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025, bringing together 16 service partners from Armed Forces families across the country. Relevant stakeholders also attended, including representatives from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Naval Families Federation (NFF), the RAF Families Federation, and the Forces Employment Charity. Throughout the workshop, participants engaged in group discussions and completed a range of activities moderated by experienced Thinks moderators:

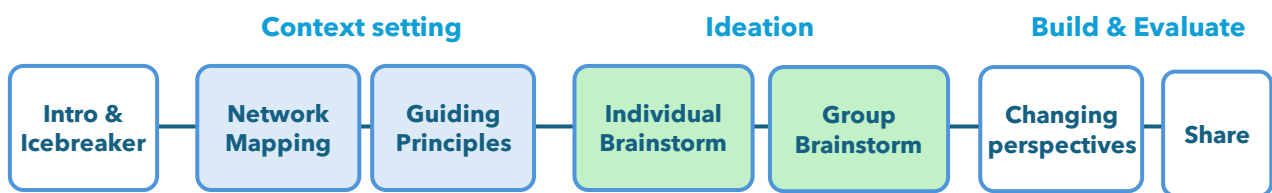


Fig 1. Overview of the co-creation workshop programme

Bringing service families and stakeholders together in the same space supported open discussion, shared understanding, and collaborative problem-solving. This method encouraged richer dialogue, creativity, and trust, enabling participants to collectively explore how potential interventions should be designed, funded, and applied within their communities. Workshop output includes:

- **Support network maps** which reflect and assess existing relationships and support to identify any hidden opportunities or areas for improvement (see **Appendix 7.7**).
- **Guiding principles** which explore what makes an effective and helpful support service for service partners (see below).
- **Intervention ideas** for three key opportunity areas (see below).
- **Feedback** from participants and stakeholders about intervention feasibility and impact (see below).

## Service families' guiding principles for intervention development

Workshop participants developed guiding principles to define what makes a good transition support. The prioritised guiding principles from the workshop are as follows:

- **Easy to access:** A simple, frictionless experience that doesn't include the service person as a gatekeeper.

*"I think what it must have is easy access, that's like the initial hurdle." - Partner (Female) of Marines*

- **Personal:** Empathetic with a human level of connection which understands and remembers the partner's unique situations.

*"Personal because everyone has a different career path." - Partner (Female) of Army*

- **Trustworthy:** Reassuring that the appropriate actions will be taken with no false promises and keeps information confidential where appropriate.

*"Trustworthy, If I'm not 100% sure I'm less likely to engage, everything about it needs to be trustworthy, I'm very suspicious because I very rarely seek help so that confidentiality is also very important to me." - Partner (Female) of Navy*

- **Consistent:** The same information and support is accessible no matter what service the family is from or where they are based with support delivered from the same individual to provide continuity of care.

*"Consistency, especially if you move around a lot." - Partner (Female) of Army*

- **Efficient:** Quick to use, fitting seamlessly into busy lives and delivering exactly what's promised without unnecessary steps or delays.

*"I'd like to assume that efficiency is automatic, but there are so many examples of that not being evident in everyday life." - Partner (Female) of Navy veteran*

These principles guided the design and evaluation of the intervention ideas throughout the day.

## Co-created intervention ideas

During the workshop, service partners and stakeholders were split into five groups. Each group discussed and co-created ideas across the three strategic opportunity areas identified in Phase 1. Ideas were first generated through individual and group discussion, then refined through collective evaluation and group sharing.

Some of the early ideas generated by participants include:

Increasing the independence of service partners	Improve access to existing support services	Harnessing the power of peer networks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A partner-facing digital portal</li> <li>• Direct partner access to housing system</li> <li>• Plain-English transition support guidance</li> <li>• Support for remote and flexible working</li> <li>• Careers training for partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer signposting and visibility of existing support services</li> <li>• A step-by-step transition journey map</li> <li>• Instant AI-assisted chat to help navigate support</li> <li>• Proactive housing officers</li> <li>• Improved welcome packs with local information</li> <li>• In-person dedicated support contact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring your partner to work day</li> <li>• Partners buddy system</li> <li>• Transition mentors</li> <li>• Armed Forces families LinkedIn badge</li> <li>• Moderated WhatsApp group for families</li> <li>• Newsletter for local Armed Forces events</li> <li>• Military partner social events</li> </ul>

The final 9 co-created intervention ideas are as follows:

Improving the independence of service partners	
<b>Training opportunities available for service partners</b>	Training opportunities (e.g. learning credits and resettlement grants) to be offered to the whole family
<b>Family ID</b>	Providing family members with a unique identified (a Family service ID number) that enables access to information, tools, and benefits to support transition
<b>Partners/family careers fair</b>	Events tailored to family members to help get practical advice on their careers, as well as transition-related support, for example related to children and housing
Improve access to existing support services	
<b>Armed Forces AI chatbot (VICKY)</b>	An AI tool / chat bot which is accessible to families 24/7 that helps them find information on transition
<b>Family transition map (My Forces Journey)</b>	A virtual map showing the stages of transition and what families can expect - that can be tailored to families unique transition journeys
<b>Stay in the know (newsletter)</b>	A newsletter emailed directly to service families which includes informative support updates, relevant information and links to support services
Improving the independence of service partners	
<b>Peers helping peers: peer moderators</b>	A peer-moderated online chatroom or channel for service families, facilitated by trained, incentivised peers
<b>Community transition champion</b>	Trained transition champions embedded within each service community who have expertise and experience of transition support and information
<b>Transition mentors / buddies - for service families</b>	1-1 peer support with a named individual - e.g. someone with lived experience of transition sharing information, guidance and support

## Prioritisation of intervention ideas with stakeholder input

Following the workshop, an online stakeholder session was held to review the workshop outputs and discuss further development of the proposed interventions. To determine which ideas to pursue, stakeholders used the criteria adapted from the behavioural framework APEASE<sup>3</sup> to prioritise potential interventions from the initial 9 concepts:

- **Acceptability:** How could we make this idea more acceptable?
- **Practicability & Affordability:** What resources or people are needed to make this work?
- **Effectiveness:** How could we make this idea more effective in supporting transitions?
- **Side-effect & Equity:** What could be the unintended impact? Is there anything we should be concerned about? Is there any context or people we're missing?

The matrix below presents the nine ideas according to the APEASE criteria and their testability.

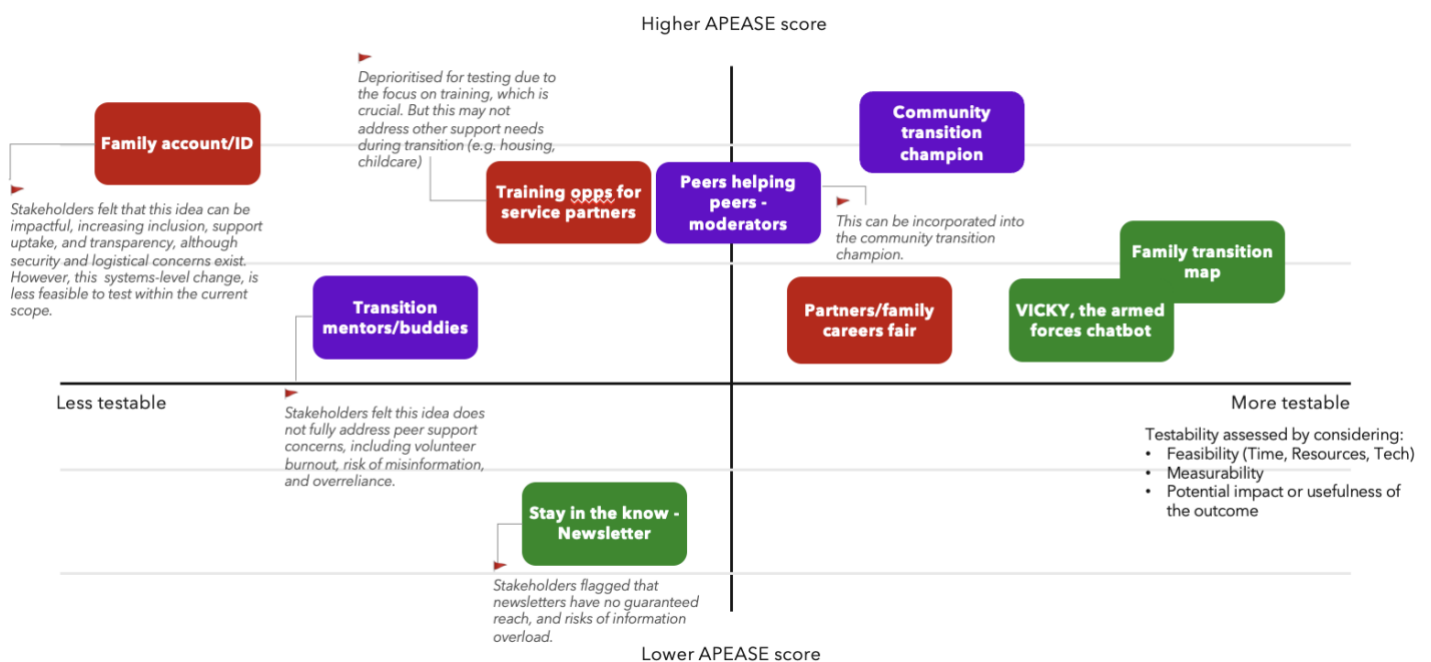


Fig 2. APEASE-Testability matrix of 9 ideas

## Final interventions

The following three ideas in this section are taken forward for further development and testing after the prioritisation activity and discussion. These ideas are considered most worth exploring as feasible solutions for the issue of poor engagement with transitioning to civilian life.

<sup>3</sup> Michie, S., van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(42).

	Family Transition Map <i>My Forces Journey</i>	Armed forces chatbot <i>VICKY</i>	Partners career fair
<b>Target behaviour</b>	Serving partners <b>start thinking about transition planning early</b> and be well prepared.	Serving partners <b>access and understand relevant transition support info</b> and navigate transitions with ease.	Serving partners <b>develop their career skills and capability</b> and navigate transitions with confidence.
<b>Key ISM factor</b>	Individual - Beliefs, attitudes, biases	Material - Infrastructure, technology	Social - Culture, norms
<b>Relevant Phase 1 findings</b>	Service families are not in a 'transition mindset' yet  Every journey is different	Service families struggle to navigate the range of support services and find it hard to understand complex process and military jargon	Service families feel frustration with being treated as 'dependents'
<b>Behavioural principles to leverage</b>	Goal gradient Timely moment Personalisation	Cognitive Ease Personalisation	Idiosyncratic fit Social proof Boosting
<b>What do we want to learn from testing?</b>	Does turning an abstract future into concrete, actionable steps prompt people to think about transition planning earlier?	Do participants find the chatbot easier to understand and faster to navigate?  Do they feel more confident using this compared to the current gov.uk website?	Does the idea of a partner-specific career fair feel welcoming and empowering?  Does the opportunity to connect with the broader service community increase partner engagement?
<b>Rationale for prioritisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-high APEASE scale, High testability</li> <li>• Can help counter information overload.</li> <li>• Could be integrated into pre-existing platforms such as Discover My Benefits.</li> <li>• Offers high usability at key stages of the transition journey.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mid-high APEASE scale, High testability. emerged as an area of interest among co-creation participants and were frequently mentioned during the workshop.</li> <li>• Can be a great tool for families navigate jargon and complex processes, reducing cognitive overload.</li> <li>• Chatbots feel intuitive and accessible to many users.</li> <li>• Can ease frustration during waiting periods which may boost engagement with support services.</li> <li>• Can be complemented by human follow-up, positioning the chatbot as an additional layer of support rather than a replacement of what's out there already.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication has been a recurring challenge identified throughout this phase of research</li> <li>• An opportunity to empower partners and families by increasing awareness and access to career support.</li> <li>• Can be embedded within existing resources, making it a useful addition to the wider support package.</li> <li>• Creates opportunities to explicitly include military partners within service provision.</li> <li>• Supports greater empowerment and enfranchisement of service families.</li> </ul>

<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires digital literacy and may risk excluding individuals who are digitally disengaged.</li> <li>A risk of providing over-generalised information, which may be demotivating.</li> <li>Resource will require ongoing updates, which could be resource-intensive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May not be suitable for those who are digitally excluded due to limited skills, confidence, or access to digital tools.</li> <li>Risk of poorly designed chatbots providing incorrect or misleading information</li> <li>Maintenance and quality control are essential. All content must be accurate, verified, and kept up to date.</li> <li>Privacy and vulnerability concerns, especially those who need human touch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overseas and separated families may be excluded.</li> <li>Risk of duplicating or adding to an already crowded events landscape.</li> <li>Careful communication is required to ensure the serving person is also acknowledged as part of the family, rather than going around serving personnel.</li> </ul>
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## User testing interventions with service communities

Thinks' behavioural team created digital prototypes of each of the three intervention ideas and tested them on an online user testing platform. User testing went live between November 12<sup>th</sup> 2025, and December 10<sup>th</sup>. We tested the prototyped interventions with 37 new serving and ex-serving partners and 5 ex-serving personnel.

The purpose of this user testing is to understand how participants interacted with the early intervention concepts and to identify opportunities for impact and improvement, focusing on:

- **Preference** - whether or not they like the tool
- **Relevance** - if they could see themselves using the tool
- **Usability** - if the tool works from a user perspective and does what it is supposed to do
- **Engagement** - whether the tool felt interesting and interactive for the user
- **Improvements** - how the tool could be improved to better support them with the transition

Due to the small sample size, we avoid using quantitative measures as generalisable metrics. Instead, our analysis emphasises observational findings and qualitative insights to inform next steps.

## 4. Final interventions: behavioural design and user testing results

### Family transition map: My Forces Journey

The family transition map is a personalised online tool that provides a progress map tailored to families' transition journeys, highlighting key stages and milestones to achieve before transitioning, and signposting to services for relevant support.

How behavioural principles have been integrated into intervention design:

Behavioural principle	Explanation	Design features
<b>Goal gradient</b> <sup>4</sup>	Our motivation and effort increase as we get closer to achieving it.	Bullet point style guide for each transition journey step
<b>Timely moment</b> <sup>5</sup>	A timely moment is a point when a person is already making a related decision or experiencing a life or context change, making them especially receptive to a behavioural prompt.	<b>Tailored support and signposting</b> relevant for the serving family's transition journey
<b>Personalisation</b> <sup>6</sup>	Designing messages or choices so they clearly connect to an individual's own situation, identity, or goals, increasing perceived relevance and engagement.	<b>Personal tailoring tools</b> (slider, quiz, filter) <b>Personalised journey map</b> and support information

#### a) Personal tailoring tool

An input stage that allows serving families to reflect on their journey stage and their needs. This creates a personalised feeling. Users can use the slider to enter their current stage in the journey (i.e., time remaining until their expected transition), complete a short personality-style quiz (e.g., "How do you usually approach planning for major life

<sup>4</sup> Hull, C. L. (1932). The goal-gradient hypothesis and maze learning. *Psychological Review*, 39, 25-43.

<sup>5</sup> Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Yale University Press.

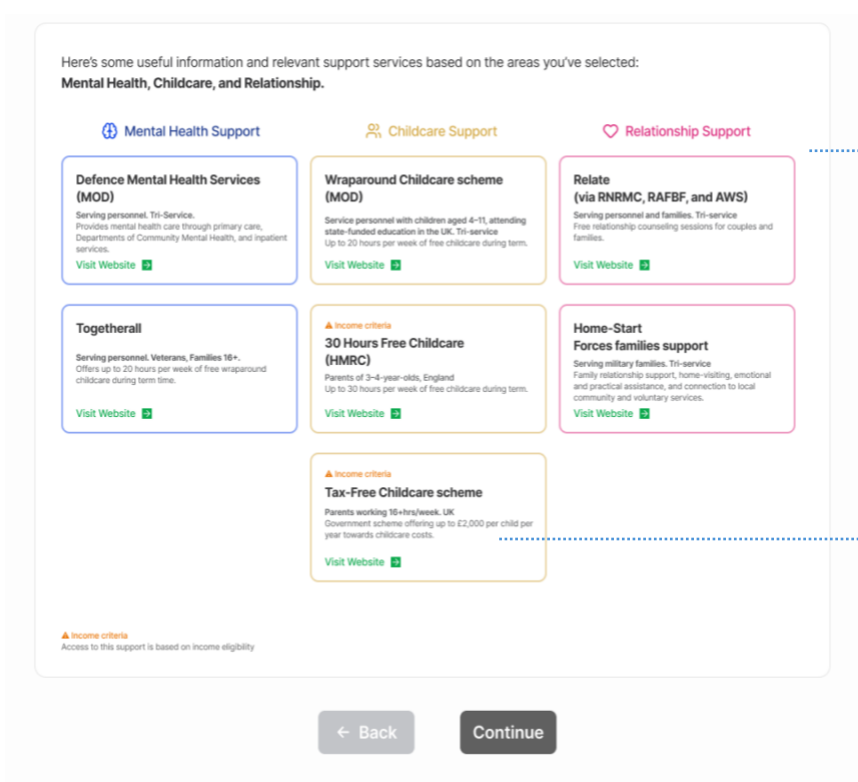
<sup>6</sup> Service, O., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., Algate, F., Gallagher, R., Nguyen, S., Ruda, S., & Sanders, M. (2014). EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights [White paper]. The Behavioural Insights Team.



The following screen allows families to learn more about other journey stages, helping them review where they currently are and what lies ahead – reducing **uncertainty aversion**<sup>8</sup>. It also offers a checklist-style guide, breaking a **process into smaller steps**<sup>9</sup> that users easily access and consider what is needed at each stage.

### c) Tailored support and signposting

Based on the user’s selected support categories and identified journey stage, relevant support services for **the unique needs of individuals** are displayed with direct links. These support services are **chunked**<sup>10</sup> up into specific categories – helping the longlist of support feel easier to digest and more manageable. Additional indicators help users check service eligibility.



#### Tailored support info

Support information relevant to chosen categories and serving families’ journey stages is displayed

#### Signposting

Direct link to support services & Criteria and caveat labelled

### User testing feedback

**“It’s a great tool to help you move forward in life”**

- Partner (Male) of Army

<sup>8</sup> Ellsberg, D. (1961). Risk, ambiguity, and the Savage axioms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 75(4), 643–669.

<sup>9</sup> Kivetz, R., Urminsky, O., & Zheng, Y. (2006). The goal-gradient hypothesis resurrected: Purchase acceleration, illusory goal progress, and customer retention. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(1), 39–58.

<sup>10</sup> Miller, G. A. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. *Psychological Review*, 63(2), 81–97

Out of the three interventions tested, participants chose *My Forces Journey* as their favourite. They feel it works well as a **tailored 'one-stop shop' for Armed Forces families**. This tool makes it easier to find tailored support and prompts people to start preparing for an earlier transition. Participants like the holistic approach with clear signposting to a range of support options. They feel the tool is made for them and would support the wider Forces community with simple, comprehensive guidance.

Below are what user testing participants find appealing about the *My Forces Journey* tool:

- **RELEVANCE:** Participants feel *My Forces Journey* tool is made for them. This tool feels inclusive and relevant to everyone in the Forces community at all stages of the journey.

*"The tool was very optimised for anybody to use. It was simple yet effective and was easy to navigate." - Partner (Female) of RAF*

- **PREFERENCE:** Participants like the holistic approach of this tool, especially specific support around mental health and child support

*"All of these [support resources] are really good because when I left, I wasn't told any of this. Just careers stuff." - Navy veteran (Male)*

- **USABILITY:** Participants find the tool is straightforward and effective, making it easier to find tailored support. It is also timesaving as all the information needed is at users' fingertips.

- **VALUE:** Few participants expect this tool to help serving families prepare for transition early. Participants liked its potential to help serving families think about transition early. Also some participants commented it can be a good tool to start a difficult transition conversation.

*"These conversations are hard to have, so if you can create a bit of structure around it..." - Partner (Male) of Army*

### Suggestions for intervention development include:

- **Make it even more personal** - through robust, relevant background questions - Participants want to be asked more questions about their backgrounds, so that the tool can provide even more tailored results.

*"I'd like more filters and more questions to ascertain where you are in life could be given." - Partner (Female) of Army*

- **Harness the power of peer networks** - add peer testimonials to provide relatable case study examples from people like them - giving a sense of 'human touch'.

*"80% of families transition better, that's great but if people can see an actual story from an actual family that's far more relatable and impactful." - Partner (Male) of Army*

- **Improve usability of the input tools** - continue to test the usability of some of the design features - most participants use the input features (i.e. sliders, filters, quizzes) without issue, though some find this step complicated.

## VICKY: The Armed Forces chatbot

VICKY is an AI-enabled online chatbot that users can interact with to receive guidance and information about relevant support services, that are unique to their needs.

How behavioural principles have been integrated into intervention design:

Behavioural principle	Explanation	Design features
<b>Cognitive ease</b>	A feeling of smooth, low-effort processing that occurs when information or a process is familiar, simple, and requires minimal effort.	<b>Familiar, intuitive chatbot interface</b> Jargon-free language Clear, simple signposting
<b>Personalisation<sup>11</sup></b>	Designing messages or choices so they clearly connect to an individual's own situation, identity, or goals, increasing perceived relevance and engagement.	Tailored filtering questions and relevant support information Option for <b>human follow-up</b>

### a) Familiar intuitive chatbot interface

A user-friendly AI chatbot provides serving personnel, ex-serving individuals, and their families with quick access to relevant support, services and information through a familiar conversational interface. Designed for ease and immediacy, the chatbot allows users to ask everyday questions and receive clear, tailored responses without unnecessary friction.

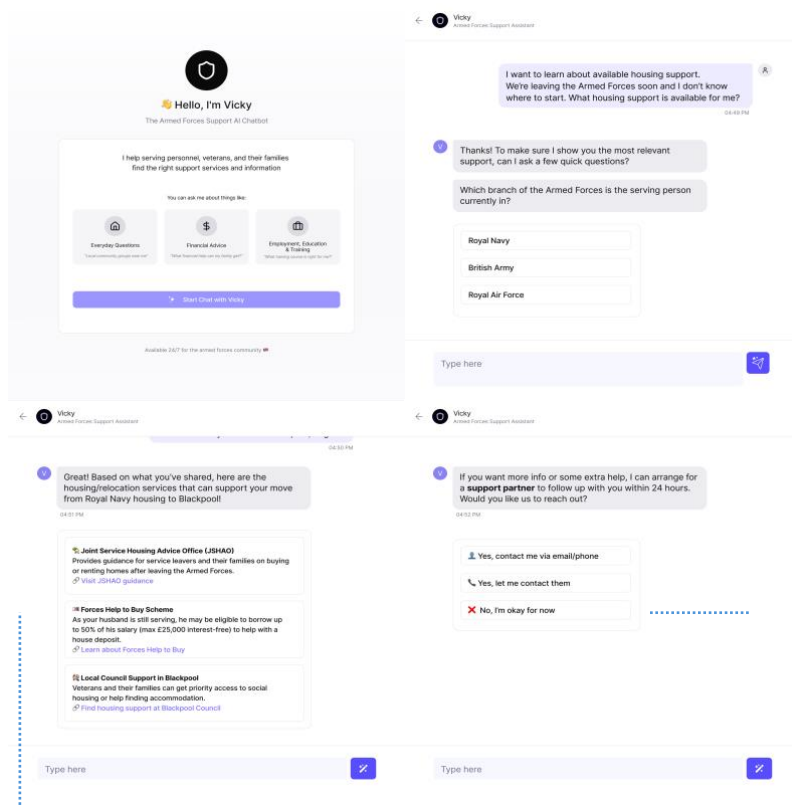
<sup>11</sup> Service, O., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., Algate, F., Gallagher, R., Nguyen, S., Ruda, S., & Sanders, M. (2014). EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights. The Behavioural Insights Team.

The chatbot is designed to help users get support on topics that they may feel unsure about raising, or where it is unclear where to seek help (for example, “What career support am I entitled to as a partner?”). By offering discreet, judgment-free guidance, it can support **psychological safety**<sup>12</sup> and reduce barriers to help-seeking and support informed decision-making. Where appropriate, the chatbot signposts users to trusted onward support across key areas such as finances, housing, health and wellbeing, helping people navigate complex systems more confidently and efficiently.

## b) Human follow-up option

During the co-creation workshop, nearly all groups emphasised the need for proactive outreach and the importance of an **empathetic**<sup>13</sup>, human touch. For this reason, a final step has been added that allows users to request a human follow-up.

This can assist users who need a human touch, while also **reducing uncertainty and managing expectations**<sup>14</sup> as they wait to hear back from support services, by providing information or actions to take. Additionally, it can help support services operate more efficiently by allowing matters that do not require human support to be handled by a chatbot.



**Follow-up support question**  
For users who need to discuss the matter with a human support representative.

### Support service signposting

<sup>12</sup> Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383.

<sup>13</sup> Riess, H. (2017). The science of empathy. *Journal of Patient Experience*, 4(2), 74-77.

<sup>14</sup> Tanovic, E., et al. (2018). Individual differences in willingness to wait in uncertainty. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 61, 95-102.

## User testing feedback

***“The chatbot give you an understanding to access in-person support really quickly, which would be invaluable when starting the journey back to work”***

*- Partner (Male) of Navy*

Participants like the chatbot’s ease of use and jargon-free answers - feeling it could be a tool they would use in day-to-day life. Most of the test participants prefer the experience of finding support through the chatbot to searching manually on GOV.UK website, highlighting its ease of use, fast response times and tailoring.

- **RELEVANCE:** The chatbot feels personal and tailored to individual needs.

*“It was a seamless experience, and easier to digest the information given to me, that is more specific to my needs, rather than the website.” - Partner (Male) of Army*

- **PREFERENCE:** Participants like the chatbot’s quick responses and the service's 24/7 availability. They find it valuable to promptly get answers to their questions. However, when it comes to sensitive topics, some participants acknowledge the need for human touch and like the option for human support.

*“This is a great service and would give families a great deal of piece of mind knowing they can speak to someone with regards to support in around 24 hours.” - Partner (Male) of Navy*

*“It would help in looking for options, good feature regarding how to contact them.” - Partner (Female) of Army*

- **USABILITY:** Participants find it easier to navigate and find information compared to the support webpage. Also, communication information was felt easy to understand with jargon-free terms.

*“It was a seamless experience, and easier to digest the information given to me, that is more specific to my needs, rather than the website.” - Partner (Male) of Army*

## Suggestions for intervention development include:

- **Make it clearer that the tool is AI-powered:** a minority of participants did not understand that the answers are generated by AI, and others who did understood that this would make its use dependent on the type of request.
- **Provide assurances that the information is being kept up to date**

- **Ensure that human follow up support is available to signpost to** – some feel the tool lacks empathy when discussing sensitive topics, such as housing, where human contact might be better.

*“Ideally, you want to be able to speak to a human being, to ensure empathy and care. It's already so difficult to move constantly.” – Partner (Female) of Navy*

## Partners’ career fair

Whilst career fairs already exist for serving personnel, partners desire something that’s specifically for them. This idea aims to address this by providing career events or services that help partners connect with potential employers, find job opportunities, and connect with others in similar situations.

Three different concepts for careers fairs were designed – each leveraging a different behavioural principle:

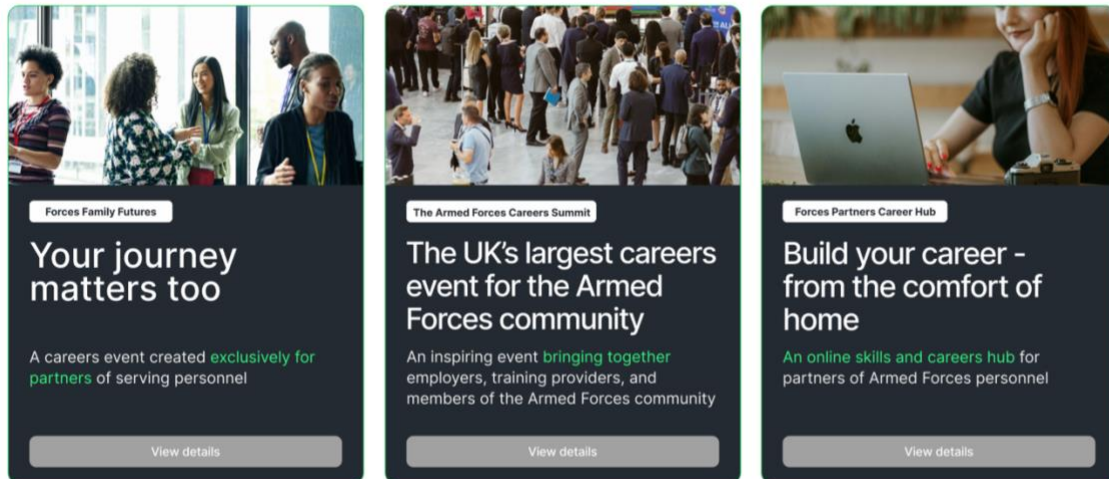
Behavioural principle	Explanation	Design features
Idiosyncratic fit <sup>15</sup>	Tailoring the event to individual’s unique circumstances, role, and preference to make it personally relevant and accessible.	Careers event exclusively for partners of serving personnel  <b>Concept A: Forces Family Futures - Your journey matters too</b>
Social proof <sup>16</sup>	People adopt behaviours they see others performing. We get motivated by observing and following others' actions, especially in uncertainty, as it signals socially validated.	Careers event designed to signal popularity and status. It suggests that attending careers fairs like this is already a norm, seeing as so many others are already doing it.  <b>Concept B: The Armed Forces Careers Summit - The UK’s largest event for the Armed Forces community</b>
Boosting <sup>17</sup>	Improving individuals’ capability and decision-making skills to empower them, preserve their agency, and enable lasting	An online skills and careers hub that can be accessible anytime anywhere – making it possible for Partners with busy lives to engage with career

<sup>15</sup> Kivetz, R., & Simonson, I. (2003). The idiosyncratic fit heuristic: Effort advantage as a determinant of consumer response to loyalty programs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 40(4), 454-467.

<sup>16</sup> Cialdini, R. B. (1984). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. Harper Business.

<sup>17</sup> Hertwig, R., & Grüne-Yanoff, T. (2017). Nudging and boosting: Steering or empowering good decisions. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(6), 973-982.

	<p>change, allowing them to independently overcome challenges.</p>	<p>support. It also provides an ongoing platform that people can refer back to for information.</p> <p><b>Concept C: Forces Partners Careers Hub - Build your career from the comfort of your home</b></p>
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## User testing feedback

***"I could learn from others and share experiences of those in a similar position"***  
*- Partner (Female) of Army*

Overall, the idea of a careers fair is thought to be helpful for providing networking opportunities, and good for specific skills support, such as CV writing (however there are also comments that this can be offered in a non-military specific context too). Participants are split about which career fair concept they find the most appealing. Different elements of each concept appeal to different people, depending on their personal circumstances and motivations.

### Concept A: Forces Family Futures

- Participants like the exclusivity of having something that is just for partners – as this helps them feel seen and supported as serving partners.
- They value the potential to network with others who have had similar experiences, as well as specific skills support – such as writing CVs.

*"Your journey matters feels like someone cares" - Partner (Female) of RAF*

### **Concept B: The Armed Forces Careers Summit - The UK's largest event for the Armed Forces community**

- Participants like the ability to connect to the larger network of peers. Also, if it's a large event, people feel more likely to speak to someone they haven't spoken to before.
- They value that there are likely to be lots of different types of options and resources available - both in who to speak to and which employers are there.

*"This provides the most obvious starting point to network and figure what is available" - Partner (Male) of Army*

### **Concept C: Forces Partners Careers Hub - Build your career from the comfort of your home**

- Participants like having all career materials in one place that you are easily able to access and return to.
- They value the opportunity to network from home, which means childcare or other responsibilities are still manageable. Some find this potentially less anxiety-inducing than getting advice in person.
- To find out about an event like this, partners would trust: primarily a message from close friends/family, followed by a social post from someone in their network. This illustrates the importance of social networks for marketing events like this.

*"I think the career hub would be the most helpful because I could access at any time" - Partner (Female) of Army*

## 5. Implications and considerations for future direction

*This research lands at a particularly important moment. With the new Veterans Strategy launched, there is renewed focus across government and delivery partners on how transition is experienced, supported and sustained over time. Preparation, connection and early engagement remain as relevant as ever for service families, and this work offers a timely opportunity to build on that momentum. The findings set out here are not intended as an endpoint, but as a catalyst – a chance to snowball existing energy into practical action.*

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### **A key implication of this work is the value of working with families, rather than just for them**

Hearing directly from service partners and families has surfaced the barriers they face, the moments that matter most during transition, and the ways in which existing support can feel fragmented or difficult to navigate. In response, the opportunities outlined in this report represent a set of initial interventions shaped through sustained involvement and deliberative co-creation with families themselves.

Transition also provides a valuable ‘way in’ for broader conversations about how the Ministry of Defence and its partners can better support spouses and partners. Framing engagement around transition creates a shared point of relevance and urgency, and opens the door to deeper, longer-term investment in family support. In this sense, transition is not just a moment to manage, but a practical starting point for building stronger relationships with families and embedding more inclusive approaches across the system.

While some of the solutions described may feel familiar, and in some cases overlap with existing provisions, their value lies in how they have been developed. The way these interventions are packaged, delivered and communicated has been informed directly by families’ lived experiences and underpinned by behavioural science best practice. For example, families consistently highlighted that the core challenge is not the volume of support available, but knowing what exists, when it is relevant, and how to access it. Tools such as the transition journey map respond directly to this reality by making support more visible, meaningful and easier to act on.

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## Crucially, involving families throughout the process has led to ideas they feel ownership over.

Participants described the experience of being involved as meaningful – from having their voices heard, to seeing their ideas developed into tangible interventions. This participatory approach not only improves the relevance and usability of solutions, but also strengthens buy-in and confidence ahead of implementation<sup>18</sup>. In turn, this sense of inclusion and recognition may contribute to families feeling more valued as part of the Armed Forces community, with potential benefits for engagement and retention over time.

*“(Journey map) was one thing that we talked about (at the workshop). So it’s lovely. It helps me feel connected to the process. I’m glad not because it’s my idea, but because I can connect.” – Recontacted partner (Female) of Navy*

*“I’m so bought into this great idea, and I want to problem solve. I’m happy to give more of my time to talk it through because I’d be really interested to sort this out and take it further.” – Recontacted partner (Female) of Navy*

The opportunities presented here therefore represent more than a set of individual interventions. They offer a practical foundation for delivery partners to build on existing work, take ideas forward into the next phase of development and testing, and continue working collaboratively with families. The following section explores each intervention in turn, outlining what has been learned so far and what would be required to move from prototype to practice – while pointing towards the potential for wider system change in the future.

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## Three interventions show real promise in improving transition outcomes for service families

### Intervention 1: Transition Journey Map

The transition map shows strong potential as a practical, family-centred way to support earlier and more confident preparation for civilian life. User testing demonstrated that while relevant support already exists, families struggle to find, navigate and engage with it. This intervention responds directly to that challenge: it is not about creating new

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<sup>18</sup> During the later stage of our user testing, we invited five service partners who had been engaged throughout Phases 1 (online community) and 2 (co-creation) of the research to review our final concept prototypes and share their feedback and reflections. Being embedded throughout the project, these participants developed a deeper understanding and perspective of the context, enabling them to provide us with valuable feedback and considerations for the intervention’s future rollout. See [Appendix 7.8](#) for what they see as critical for successful intervention rollout.

services, but about communicating what already exists in a way that feels accessible, joined-up and relevant to families' real journeys. This reinforces a key insight from the research: the issue is not the *absence* of support, but *how* that support is packaged, signposted and experienced.

<p><b>Next steps</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Intervention development:</b> Design a minimum viable product (MVP) of the transition map, working closely with delivery partners to ensure content and links are accurate, up to date and aligned with existing provision.</li> <li>• <b>Trial and evaluation:</b> Test the intervention through a robust trial design (e.g. RCT or A/B testing), where participants are randomly allocated to receive the transition map or act as a control group. Monitor key outcomes such as wellbeing, confidence, service awareness, employment outcomes and retention.</li> <li>• <b>Further qualitative testing:</b> Conduct additional user testing with a smaller sample to refine usability, tone, tailoring and relevance ahead of wider rollout.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential delivery partners</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Career Transition Partnership (CTP) / Forces Employment Charity:</b> Could encourage serving personnel to enrol their partners, although this is likely to reach families later in the transition journey once notice has been handed in.</li> <li>• <b>Single services (Army, Navy, RAF):</b> Distribution via service-specific channels, requiring referral or signposting from the serving person to their partner.</li> <li>• <b>Families Federations / HIVE network:</b> Trusted and established routes into family support, though engagement may skew towards those already actively seeking help.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Key considerations</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. How can serving personnel be encouraged and supported to refer their partners to the transition map in a way that feels natural and valued?</li> <li>ii. How might this intervention reach families much earlier in their service journey (e.g. 5-10 years before transition), when preparation could have the greatest long-term impact?</li> </ol>

## Intervention 2: AI-enabled Chatbot

User testing indicates that VICKY has strong potential as an accessible and confidence-building way for serving families to find relevant transition support. Participants valued the

ability to search for information through a chatbot rather than manually navigating complex websites such as gov.uk, particularly because it offers highly personalised responses and allows families to seek support privately on potentially sensitive topics. This intervention directly addresses families' difficulties with navigating jargon-heavy systems and fragmented information landscapes.

### Next steps

- **Chatbot development:** Progress the technical development of VICKY through one of two routes:
  - *Option 1:* Develop a standalone AI chatbot by selecting an appropriate AI model and providing structured access to relevant support content.
  - *Option 2:* Prepare and standardise existing information from support service websites so it can be accessed and processed by AI models, reducing the need to build a fully bespoke tool.
- **Trial and evaluation:** Test VICKY through a robust trial (e.g. RCT), comparing it against the transition map and/or existing support websites (such as gov.uk or CTP) with a large sample. Establish a common set of outcomes across interventions (e.g. confidence, ease of access, understanding of support, wellbeing, and engagement) to enable comparison.

### Potential delivery partners

- **AI and technology partners:** Specialist AI providers or developers (e.g. an external AI company, existing development partners, or organisations such as Faculty AI).
- **Consortium approach:** A partnership model bringing together technology providers, service owners and funders to ensure sustainability, governance and credibility.
- **Independent delivery:** Another organization yet to be identified could potentially deliver VICKY independently, provided it has access to up-to-date, authoritative information on support services.

### Key considerations

- i. Governance and accountability for content accuracy, updates and ethical use of AI.
- ii. Funding and ownership: who funds development, hosts the tool, and is responsible for ongoing maintenance?
- iii. Transparency and trust: clearly communicating that VICKY is an AI-enabled signposting tool rather than a replacement for human support, and ensuring clear routes to speak to a person when needed.

## Intervention 3: Partners Careers Fair

While careers events and employment support already exist, there are very few opportunities designed specifically for service partners. In user testing, participants strongly valued the idea of partner-focused career fairs, as these demonstrate how partners' needs are distinct from those of serving personnel. Importantly, this opportunity does not require creating entirely new infrastructure. Instead, it offers a way to optimise and reframe existing careers support so that it feels more relevant, welcoming and accessible to partners.

### Next steps

- **Share insights with delivery partners:** Communicate the findings from this research to organisations already delivering careers support, to help them optimise and adapt existing provision for partners.
- **Communications testing:** Trial alternative communications approaches (e.g. A/B testing messaging, framing and channels) to improve awareness and sign-up among service partners.
- **Light-touch piloting:** Explore opportunities to pilot partner-specific sessions within existing careers events (online or hybrid), rather than launching standalone fairs initially.

### Potential delivery partners

- **Forces Employment Charity / Reed in Partnership:** Collaborate to better market existing provision or co-create partner-specific events or streams within current programmes.
- **Charities supporting partner employment:** Organisations such as Forces Families Jobs, Op ASCEND, and others already working with service partners on skills and employment.
- **Career Transition Partnership (CTP):** While currently focused on serving personnel, CTP could support or advise on partner-specific adaptations.
- **Defence Relationship Management (DRM):** Potential route for employer engagement and national-level coordination.
- **Sector-led partners:** Organisations such as Mission Motorsport, renewables and defence-adjacent employers, or existing national transition events that could incorporate a partner-focused strand.

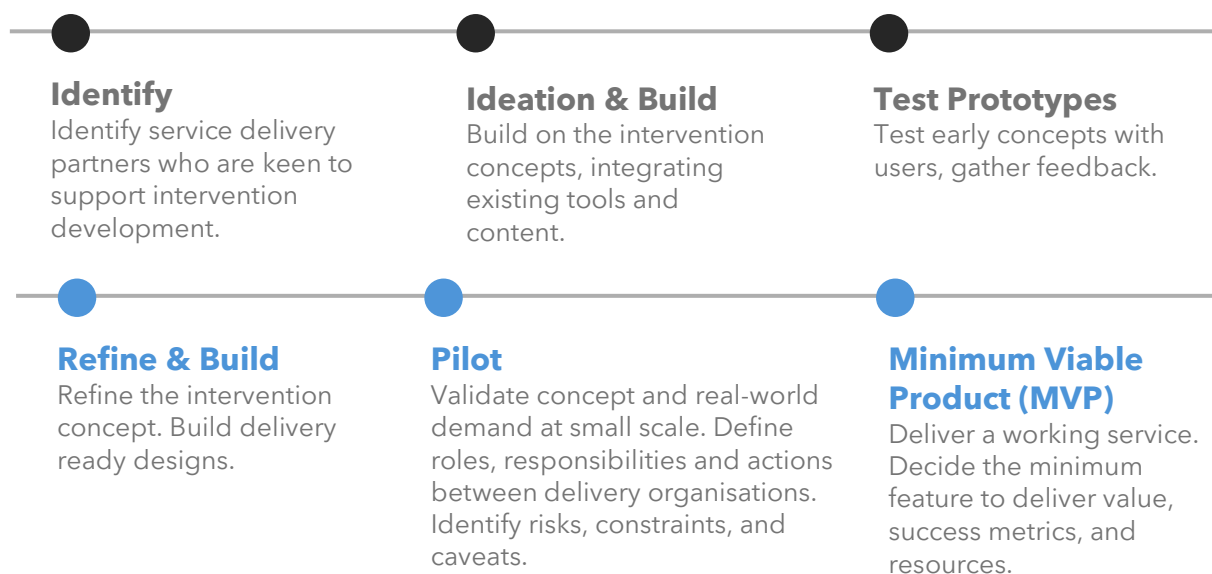
### Key considerations

- iv. What is the most effective way to reach partners who may not currently identify as 'job-seeking' or engaged with careers support?
- v. How can communications emphasise recognition of partners' distinct needs, without reinforcing perceptions of dependency?

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## The next step is to further develop and test these promising interventions, with support from service delivery partners

These interventions aren't intended to work in isolation. Instead, they could complement each other. For real impact, working with existing service delivery partners will be critical to build on the fantastic initiatives that are already in place. The second half of the journey to intervention development at a high level could look like this:



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## This research also uncovered a number of other opportunities, including proposed system-level changes, which should be considered for future development

**There are also a number of behaviour change intervention opportunities that show promise that were beyond the scope of this testing round.**

These interventions were agreed by stakeholders to be of high priority (ranking relatively higher against the APEASE criteria), so remain important and represent valuable opportunities for future development, requiring broader system shift and cross-sector collaboration for successful delivery. Intervention opportunities include creating a system that recognises and empowers serving families (for example, through a Family service ID or training credits) and bridging informal and formal support through peer networks (for example by via peer moderators or Community Transition Champions). For a full explanation of these ideas, see [Appendix 7.9](#).

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# Appendices

For more detailed information, please see the appendices in the separate document. The content is outlined below:

- 7.1 Glossary of terms
- 7.2 Phase 1 & 2 research questions and the methods
- 7.3 serving personnel's transition journey
- 7.4 A flow diagram of the methodology
- 7.5 Participant samples
- 7.6 Full list of participating stakeholder organisations (Phase 1 & Phase 2)
- 7.7 Support network map
- 7.8 Feedback from recontacted service partners across Phases 1 and 2 regarding the successful rollout of tested interventions
- 7.9 Additional behaviour change opportunities - Interventions beyond the scope of the testing round
- 7.10 Artefacts from Phase 1 research
- 7.11 Individual - Social - Material (ISM) factor analysis of serving partners' barriers and opportunities for successful transition



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