“Changing Step”: The transition from the Regular Army to civilian life and work.

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The British Army has always recognized that the majority of their full time personnel will leave the Army and move into other employment sectors before their formal retirement from the world of work. In fact, the majority of Army personnel will work, on average, longer in other employment sectors than in the Army itself with, for example, about half of personnel serving 6 years or less in the Army and a current mandatory retirement age of 55 for most personnel. Therefore, there has been a long-standing interest in managing the transition from military to civilian life for those leaving the Army. This chapter will deal with the recent history of how the Army prepares its soldiers for leaving the Army, set the context for why it does this and describe how individuals are being encouraged to think of a through career transition to civilian life that emphasizes education, individual development, personal planning and preparation for life beyond the Army. The details of the actual provisions that members of the Army can access in preparation for leaving will also briefly be described along with some of the challenges for the future.

The Army is an unusual public sector employer where individuals provide potentially unlimited liability to their employer in terms of job location, working hours and their physical and mental well-being. There is often a strong argument put forward that society has an obligation to ensure that those who have been prepared to sacrifice their life in the service of the state should not be disadvantaged by their service or when integrating back into civilian life. Thus there can be much public and political debate about the fate of individuals in the Army who have served in such conflicts that is heavily influenced by the wider attitudes to those conflicts and the changing social attitudes to ‘Veterans’ in British society. The visibility of the Army in society also interacts closely with the media reporting of conflicts to produce a view of the Army that appear to be sympathetic to the individual soldier but not very empathic or understanding of the role of the Army.
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The reputation of veterans in British society is complex and has historically not been positive. This has led to an assumption that the Army does not adequately prepare soldiers for the transition to civilian life. For example, a letter from 1881 states ‘…the nation treats its soldiers like oranges, that having sucked them dry, it throws them aside’. Similar quotes can be found all the way to the present day. Combined with persistent negative beliefs about the impact of military service on the mental health of veterans, it is not surprising that negative beliefs about the employment prospects of veterans still strongly persist.

Yet, Army employment policies related to transition are evident from at least the time of the Napoleonic wars. At the end of the First World War it was realized that the masses of citizens who had served in the Army needed a process of education and employment specific training to ‘resettle’ them back into civilian life. However, the largest leap forward for transition related policies probably happened when the Army moved from being a conscripted force to ‘all volunteer’ in the early 1960’s. There followed a realisation that for an all-volunteer army to succeed in attracting new entrants it needed to be seen as a ‘Good Employer’. Key to this was amending the terms and conditions of service that dealt with out of date social assumptions (such as that officers had a private income they could rely on after service) and enabling a second career through flexible early retirement options (for example, providing an immediate pension from the Army to provide some financial security to offset their late entry to a second career as well as a cash gratuity to help secure a house) as well as options for education and training prior to leaving the Army. Since then there have been many improvements made to how personnel are prepared for leaving the Army.

Thus, while negative beliefs about poor preparation for transition may have had some validity in the past more recent longitudinal studies show that military service for most Veterans is a positive boost to post service life. Employment rates for veterans are high with 84% of leavers in employment within 6 months, 8% unemployed and 9% economically inactive over the period 2009 to 2014. This compares to the UK Labour Force Survey showing employment
rates of 70%, 8% unemployed and 24% economically inactive over the same period. Further to this there is evidence that service life acts as a successful form of social mobility for many individuals through personal development, trade qualifications and education for life. The qualities and experience of Army personnel as a result of service such as positive attitude, team work, adaptability, commitment, trainability and problem solving all continue to be recognized and valued by many employers.

**The move from ‘Resettlement’ to ‘Transition’**

While there has always been a message that the professional and personal development aspects of Army life help in the preparation for civilian life, many personnel across the Army have had the perception that the move to civilian life was only to be thought of in terms of the ‘end of career’ set of processes offered by the Army called ‘resettlement’. These processes are bounded by either the submission of a notice to leave from an individual, two calendar years before an end of contract date or from when the Army has given notice to leave to an individual. Due to this end of career focus, resettlement is primarily concerned with immediate finance, securing housing and providing the knowledge and the capability to compete for employment. Training, education, welfare and health, while present, are more and more peripheral to resettlement. Therefore, the focus on civilian life was often too late to take advantage of the opportunities that existed during service and some aspects of long term planning were lacking.

However, since 2012 the Army has taken a more ‘whole career’ approach that has adopted the term ‘Transition’ wholeheartedly. This approach takes the in-service ‘support pillars’ of military service comprising Employment, Education, Health, Housing and Welfare (E2H2W), providing greater coordination and focus and extends to include preparation for moving to civilian life. It is defined in the following way:
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‘Transition – Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) is a through-career offer of support, advice and education that supports personal development in order to enable soldiers (and their families) to plan for a successful military career and prepare for their inevitable return to civilian life.’

This conceptual change was prompted by the perception that a significant number of individuals left their planning for transition to the few months before leaving the Army, when unsurprisingly stress can be high, thereby denying themselves the opportunity to progressively develop and plan their futures. Major decisions have to be taken about finance and employment and lack of long-term preparation can substantially narrow the options open to the leaver and their family. Those individuals who suddenly find themselves unable to continue in the Army through unexpected circumstances such as injury were also at a disadvantage by the emphasis on end of career resettlement.

Therefore, transition represents an initiative towards ensuring that information and support relevant to the pursuit of a successful military career and life post-service should be available at all points of a career and to create an expectation of personal responsibility for post-service life from an early point. This should help ensure that the process of transition is as smooth as possible. Further benefits of a ‘through career’ transition are thought to come from the greater awareness of education and personal development that will positively impact on individuals’ ‘personal resilience, independence, confidence and mental robustness’, and so have the double benefit of providing better soldiers in service as well as more successful individuals in civilian life. This increased success is hoped to have a positive impact on the reputation of the Army in society and also enhance the perception of the Army as a good employer that in turn will support the recruitment and retention of soldiers in service.

These are ambitious aims and it has certainly broadened the organizational view of what support should be offered to an individual. Key to this is the provision of information
throughout a career that raises the awareness of the benefits of embracing the transition message - backed up by a bank of internet and print resources. It remains to be seen how individual perceptions of transition will evolve within the Army but an emphasis on transition has highlighted, in particular, the role of education and training throughout a career.

The Army has, in fact, been a provider of education qualifications from the 19th Century for the enhancement of both professional and personal development. This continues today with a large investment in through career education and training for all members of the Army. The different branches, and many varied occupations or trades, within the Army have educational entry requirements that vary considerably. However, the Army provides professional education and training for all ranks that is appropriate for their military roles throughout their career. The Army also provides many thousands of apprenticeships each year as a recognized framework for much of this training.

The Army is committed to ensuring individuals achieve government directed targets in Functional Skills in English and Maths and these skills are required for promotion to junior non-commissioned officer rank and advancement to senior non-commissioned officers. This ties education to promotion by ensuring all individuals have minimum education standards for their role and that they have the level of skills and education required to undertake training, be operationally effective and to take advantage of professional and career opportunities. Specialist support to improve literacy and numeracy skills with Basic Skills Development Managers is available through a network of Army Education Centres.

Command, leadership and management (CLM) training and education for promotion also encompass communication and personal development as core topics. These courses, and many others, can count towards civilian accredited qualifications or membership of professional bodies. Through their career some are selected to attend education courses to access certain job roles or can pursue education for personal development that, while
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subsidized, may require out of hours working and some financial contribution (for example, many external undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications). Those who have left the Army can take their first full Level 3 (A Level equivalent) qualification or first HE qualification with full state paid tuition up to ten years after leaving service.

This is an impressive education offer to the individual over the course of a career and demonstrates the value of education to the organization. However, some have pointed out that currently the take up of these education opportunities are less than might be expected.\(^2\) This will hopefully be addressed by increasing general awareness under the transition initiative.

Financial awareness is another key aspect to successful transition and needs to be developed early. Thus, the Armed Forces have introduced a financial awareness package ‘Moneyforce’ to all its soldiers, their partners and families. This is a joint initiative between Standard Life Charitable Trust, The Royal British Legion and the Ministry of Defence. A mandatory set of briefings are given to soldiers at various stages of their career including during CLM training. A detailed website and access to bespoke briefings is also available.

Securing housing on leaving the Army can be a concern. The Army provides both family and single soldier accommodation during service that makes the mobile nature of service life easier to bear but can have the impact of deferring consideration of securing private accommodation until the resettlement phase. Thus, queries about housing and homelessness prior to leaving the Army were among the most commonly cited in a recent survey of Army leavers.\(^2\) The UK Government has provided a specific Armed Forces ‘Help to buy’ scheme to enable long term financial planning for a house purchase and assist with a loan for a house deposit. This has proved popular and will help personnel plan for the future more easily.

Current Resettlement Provision
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Much of current resettlement provision is delivered by a private company, currently Right Management, and is managed through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) under contract to the MOD. Access to resettlement benefits is based on time served in the Army. Those who have between four and six years’ service receive the Employment Support programme. Personnel who have served more than six years, or are to be medically discharged, are eligible for the Full Support Programme whilst the latter are also eligible for the CTP Assist Programme.

The Employment Support programme provides access to a job finding service, such as those run by the Regular Forces Employment (RFEA) charity or the ‘RightJob database’, an employment consultant interview with further consultant support for up to 2-years post leaving. Access is also provided (on a standby basis) to Resettlement Training Centre courses and many employment and training fairs. Leavers also receive a Housing brief and a “Financial Aspects of Resettlement” brief.

The Full Support Programme provides everything above plus the leaver can access an Individual Resettlement Training Costs (IRTC) grant to spend on training courses as well as resettlement leave of up to a maximum of 35 days. A Career Transition Workshop is also available with other workshops such as retirement options, future employment option, small business start-ups etc. Advice on CV writing, interview skills, access to the career transition interactive website (myPlan) and access to a career consultancy are also provided. In addition, the education benefits specified earlier in the chapter are available.

Contrary to popular belief, those who may have the most difficulty with transition to civilian life are those with the shortest length of service (Defined as Early Service Leavers or ESLs) rather than those who have served longest and have often been thought of as ‘institutionalized’. ESLs may lack life and employment experience and may not have benefited from the educational and training opportunities open to those who serve longer.
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Thus, ESLs (and those who leave for disciplinary reasons) qualify for the CTP Future Horizons Programme prior to leaving. This provides similar levels of advice and support to the Employment Support Programme through a consultant/advisor and is designed and delivered by the RFEA with other service charities under contract to the MOD. 27

Conclusions

The Transition offer and resettlement package represent a considerable investment in those individuals leaving the Army. This is because it has long been recognized that the transition to civilian life is not necessarily easy and for a small minority of leavers is very problematic. 28 Those personnel that fall into hardship or unhappiness can take advantage of the services availed by Veterans UK, part of the Ministry of Defence, or the many government sponsored and other service charities across the UK. It is worth noting that the small proportion of personnel that fall into hardship or unhappiness may have done so for similar reasons as the general population such as relationship breakdown, poor health and well-being issues, employment or business stresses and living in isolation. Planning for the future that bit earlier may help prevent some of these difficulties arising later in life and there is some evidence that the provision the Army makes available to leavers is positively regarded. For example, the sources of help which leavers found most helpful after service in the Armed Forces during resettlement were: the CTP guidance prior to discharge (71%), the employment support (56%), and the overall support from the Armed Forces (51%). 29

However, the same follow up questionnaires also elicited the top three challenges in securing civilian employment, a year after leaving the Armed Forces. These were firstly ‘converting military experience into a CV’ (47%) then ‘Converting their experience to provide examples for competence based application forms’ (43%) and ‘Adapting to working within a civilian organization’ (29%). 30 This difficulty with converting military to civil experience is not a new issue and has been behind recent initiatives to accredit military qualifications with civil equivalents. The Army is considering using a Personal Development Record to assist with
this work as part of a ‘New Employment Model’. However, accreditation has taken some time to get going and is not necessarily straightforward for translating some specialist military work.\textsuperscript{31}

Fully embracing ‘through life’ Transition offers rewards for the Army, their personnel and civilian employers if realized. There are challenges to overcome though. For instance, the relatively low take up of education opportunities and of public exam qualifications such as GCSE’s in serving Army personnel can potentially lead to difficulty when the attainment of GCSE A*-C in Maths and English is still seen as fundamental by many employers.\textsuperscript{32} The lower take up may be due to a number of factors relating to awareness of opportunity and workplace pressures on time or misguidedly focusing on the immediate needs of the job. The move towards through career transition is hoped to make more individuals consider education and development opportunities earlier in their career. Therefore, further monitoring is necessary to see if the ‘Transition’ initiative does succeed in helping soldiers to plan earlier for the rest of their non-military working life. However, the measurement of potential success will not be easy as this will require the monitoring of civilian life stories across a dispersed population over a number of years.

Continued work on improving the reputation of the Army so that employers can recognize and translate the benefits of Army employment is also required. In the era of the ‘Strategic Corporal’\textsuperscript{33} the Army has been quick to emphasize the development of personal initiative and the ability to think and plan through complex problems in all ranks. However, societal views of Army personnel as rigid and unthinking persist in many HR departments.\textsuperscript{34} There is a marked difference between employers who can reflect on bringing positive military qualities into the civilian workplace and those who may think all service leavers will continue to behave like a stereotypical soldier in their new work place. Further work is needed to make this difference clear to employers so that they may benefit from those who have served in the
Army and those in the Army can secure fulfilling and worthwhile future employment after experiencing their own transition.

1 Changing step is an obvious military term to use in this context and many have used it before. However it is also a reference to one of the classic in depth studies of UK Service Leavers in the last 25 years whose qualitative case studies can still enlighten and educate. See R Jolly (1996) Changing Step: From military to civilian life: people in transition, (London Brassey’s (UK) Ltd.)

2 The average age of a Service Leaver is 32 but the distribution is skewed by three significant peaks in those leaving; those leaving during basic training (17-19 years), those who leave after their initial engagement period of four years (22-23 years), and those who serve a ‘full career’ of 22 years (40-42 years) with only a minority of soldiers and officers serving till 55. Under a ‘New Employment Model’ being scoped the retirement age may rise to 60 but the three peaks of service leavers will likely remain similar. See the National Audit Office Report (2007) Leaving the Services, (HMSO) and also see Career Transition Partnership quarterly statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment Outcomes 2009/10 to 2013/14 (UK Ministry of Defence 11 June 2015).

3 In this chapter we will only deal with the part of the Army in full time or ‘Regular Army’ service. Although recent steps have been taken to widen transition to include the Reservist components of the Army (who are mainly part time) the Regular Army will continue to provide the bulk of individuals through transition and resettlement and so is the focus of this chapter. The chapter due to space constraints only provides an overview of the transition process. See http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23590.aspx, Accessed 21 October 2015.
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4 As detailed in the recent UK Armed Forces Covenant.

5 A UK Veteran is officially defined as someone who has served in the military for at least one day. See A Wyatt (March 2002) Development of the Veterans Initiative by the Ministry of Defence, Case Study (Sunningdale Park, UK: The International Comparisons in Policy Making Team, International Public Service Group, Cabinet Office’s Centre for Management and Policy Studies, the Civil Service College). One of the reasons for this all inclusive definition is that it has been found that ‘Early Service Leavers’ tend to do worse outside the military than those who leave the military later in life. Thus, this definition allows the Early Service Leaver to access external services as a veteran that can help them with potential transition difficulties. For counterview comments on more popular definitions see C Dandeker et al. (2006) ‘What's in a Name? Defining and Caring for "Veterans": The United Kingdom in International Perspective’ Armed Forces and Society 32, 161.


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See also V Connelly & M Burgess (2013) ‘Suicide among Falkland war veterans - Understanding why misleading ‘sound bites’ about veterans are more believable than ‘sound statistics’, (Rapid Response) British Medical Journal


14 ‘The Armed Forces Literacy and Numeracy Policy is effective: it provides a statement of high level support for literacy and numeracy improvement and development, an essential element in ensuring a Whole Organisation Approach to literacy and numeracy provision. There is clear evidence of a high record of achievement in literacy and numeracy, a strong culture of training and development, and the Services are strongly committed to supporting personnel with literacy and numeracy needs. Literacy and numeracy policy in the Services thus represents a model of national significance, with lessons and implications for large employers in non-military contexts.’ (p.32) BIS Research Paper Number 78 (June 2012) Armed Forces Basic Skills Longitudinal Study: Part 1...

15 https://www.ctp.org.uk/successstories

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17 See http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23590.aspx

18 Those voluntarily leaving the Army must give at least 12 months’ notice to leave if their contract is not yet complete. This elongated notice period is typically longer than the notice periods in civilian life but gives the Army the chance to adjust their inflows as a consequence. Unlike many other industries or professions all new starters begin at the bottom of the employment scale and so require extensive periods of training. This does mean though that individuals do, in theory, have a reasonable amount of time to prepare for transition and resettlement.

19 See the recent review for further examples by Michael Ashcroft (2014). The Veterans’ Transition Review, (Biteback Publishing)


21 See http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23590.aspx


23 Ashcroft


26 Additionally the next of kin of those who die or are incapacitated in service qualify for the full resettlement programme. Those selected for redundancy in periodic times of force reductions, such as 2011-2014, also qualify for full resettlement no matter their length of service.

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30 Leaving the Services


32 See Ashcroft, page 43 for MOD 2013 TESRR figures, for example, showing an 8% annual take up for Standard Learning Credits for a course of study towards a nationally recognized qualification. See also A Wolf (2011) Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report. (London: Department for Education) for employer positive attitudes to GCSE’s and page 14, Recommendation 9 ‘Students who are under 19 and do not have GCSE A*-C in English and/or Maths should be required, as part of their programme, to pursue a course which either leads directly to these qualifications, or which provide significant progress towards future GCSE entry and success. The latter should be based around other Maths and English qualifications which have demonstrated substantial content and coverage; and Key Skills should not be considered a suitable qualification in this context. DfE and BIS should consider how best to introduce a comparable requirement into apprenticeship frameworks.’

33 A reference to the modern day fact that a slip in behavior or wrong decision from a relatively lowly rank in the Army that is then highlighted in the international media can have a decisive impact on the outcome of that conflict. See https://hbr.org/2010/10/the-strategic-corporal.html. Accessed 21 October 2015.