

Snapshot t employment

Snapshot *Noun* [c] (UNDERSTANDING)

A piece of information or short description that gives an understanding of a situation at a particular time

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**A plain language summary of research and evidence
relating to the UK Armed Forces and veteran
community**

(Updated February 2021)

Produced by the FiMT Research Centre, supported by The Royal British Legion

FiMT
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Research Centre



About the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre

[The Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre](#) was established in October 2017 within The [Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research](#) at Anglia Ruskin University. The Centre curates the Veterans & Families Research Hub, provides advice and guidance to research-involved stakeholders and produces targeted research and related outputs. The Centre is funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), which commissions research to contribute to a solid evidence base from which to inform, influence and underpin policymaking and service delivery.

About Snapshots

Snapshots are designed to aid understanding of complex issues in relation to the Armed Forces (AF), and to support decision-making processes by bridging gaps between academic research, government and charitable policy, service provision and public opinion. Snapshots are aimed primarily at those working in policymaking and service provision roles for the AF, and might also be useful to those seeking facts, figures, and informed comment to empower a more objective discussion among the wider population, including the AF community and the media. The purpose of these Snapshots is to review and interpret research and policy, and to set out brief, plain language summaries to ease understanding and perception.

The FiMT Research Centre has produced a range of Snapshots covering many of the main themes and topics relating to the AF, veteran, and families community. Due to the constant process of research and policy changes, Snapshots will be updated regularly to maintain their relevance. Contributions and [comment](#) are welcome via the [Veterans & Families Research Hub](#), where the Snapshots are hosted.

Whilst these summaries are produced using recognised research processes, they are written for a lay audience and cover only academic and [grey](#) (unpublished or non-commercial) literature relating to UK AF issues. Searches have been conducted by reviewing electronic databases and references from relevant articles and reports, as well as a review of websites provided by government and other appropriate organisations.

Version and authors

Based on an original version published by Dr Linda Cooper, Kristina Fleuty (FiMT Trust Research Centre) and Andy Pike (Policy Manager at The Royal British Legion) in 2018, this current version was updated in February 2021 by Dr Graham Cable, Kristina Fleuty, Alex Cooper and Professor Michael Almond from the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre, with the help of Dr Lauren Godier-McBard of Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research.

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1 Introduction and definitions

This Snapshot summarises research into issues surrounding UK AF veterans' employment in the civilian labour market and sets out policy responses and current structures of support, presenting information sources where available online. Given the UK focus, it exclusively covers the UK labour market.

It also draws on the theory that employment choices made before and while in-Service, as well as during the processes of transition and resettlement, are important in determining post-discharge vulnerability and/or security in future employment. It is further organised around three stages of military life: in-Service; transition and resettlement; and post-Service.

The following terms are relevant (further terms and their definitions are [here](#)):

- The term **'transition'** is used to describe the period of (re)integration into civilian life from the AF. For the purposes of this Snapshot, it starts from the point during a period of military engagement at which AF personnel begin their resettlement process, which can continue for several years from discharge.
- **'Resettlement'** describes the formal processes and procedures by which military-to-civilian transition is managed, and the formal support provided to AF Leavers during this transition. It starts with the activation of the resettlement process and continues until the end of resettlement support provision.
- The term **'Early Service Leaver'** ([ESL](#)) refers to those who leave the AF, for whatever reason, within four years of joining.
- The terms **veteran** and **ex-Service personnel** are used interchangeably. The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) definition of a **'veteran'** is anyone who has 'served for at least a day in HM AF, whether as a Regular or a Reservist'. This includes Royal Fleet Auxiliary and Merchant Navy personnel who have served in support of the AF.
- For distinctions between **'Regular'** and **'Reservist'** AF roles and commitments, please see example [British Army definitions](#).

2 What's new in this 2021 update?

2.1 The Armed Forces employment policy and support landscape in 2021

Veterans and their families have gained increased recognition in the UK through the establishment of the [Office for Veterans' Affairs \(OVA\)](#) in October 2019. The OVA is responsible for championing veterans and coordinating the efforts of the UK Government to ensure the right support is available during the transition back to civilian life. The OVA is also responsible for the action plan to deliver the [recent Strategy for Our Veterans](#), published jointly by the UK (including the Northern Ireland Office), Scottish and Welsh governments in November 2018. The Strategy includes 'Employment, Education and Skills' as a key theme and acknowledges that whilst veterans leave the AF with many valuable skills, they may find it difficult to translate these to the civilian labour market, and employers may lack understanding of their military background. One of the outcomes of the

Strategy plans for 2028 is that ‘Veterans enter appropriate employment and can continue to enhance their careers throughout their working lives’ (p.17).

The [UK Government’s Consultation Response](#) to the [Strategy](#) highlighted the need to develop means to support civilian employers to identify and utilise veterans’ skills. Building on the commitments of the [Strategy](#), in 2020 the UK Government [announced](#) their intention to introduce a National Insurance contribution holiday for employers of veterans in their first year of civilian employment, enabling employers to claim relief on these payments from April 2021. Additionally, it was [announced](#) by the OVA in February 2020 that veterans would be given guaranteed interviews for UK Civil Service jobs.

The Scottish Government [published a document](#) in 2020 outlining how they would take the [Strategy](#) forward. Regarding veterans’ employment, the Scottish Government committed to promote awareness and understanding of veterans’ transferable skills and to improve employability support for veterans. This included the launch of a Support for Veterans page on the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#) website, supporting veterans to map their military qualifications against those which are recognised by employers in Scotland. In addition, the Scottish Government committed to promoting engagement with further and higher education for veterans and their families, including developing a [Veteran Network of Champions for Further and Higher Education](#). Furthermore, the [Scottish Veterans Commissioner](#) published the [Positive Futures: Getting Transition Right in Scotland](#) document in December 2020, outlining employment and education-based recommendations for supporting veterans in transition to civilian life. The overarching recommendation of this document was that the current UK transition model be updated, with a focus on preparing Service Leavers for transition to civilian employment early and utilising a flexible and accessible approach that is integrated throughout an individual’s military career.

The Welsh Government carried out a scoping exercise, [published in 2020](#), to reflect the key themes of the [Strategy for Our Veterans](#). Regarding employment, a lack of awareness from employers of the skills and expertise developed during military service, and difficulties translating military qualifications for the civilian labour market, were identified as key issues. Commitments to remedy these issues were made, including promotion of the [Forces Families jobs scheme](#) in Wales.

In August 2020, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland [announced](#) the appointment of the first Veterans Commissioner for Northern Ireland, who will act as an independent point of contact to support and enhance outcomes for veterans in that part of the United Kingdom. As yet, no formal documents are available regarding employment and veterans/families specifically relating to Northern Ireland.

However, the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Reports in [2019](#) and [2020](#) highlighted new strategies and support for employment for veterans across the devolved nations of the UK. This included a record number of organisations receiving the Gold [Employer Recognition Scheme](#) awards (100 in 2019; 127 in 2020). New employment support offered for veterans includes:

- Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) [RISE programme](#) for veterans in transition, providing an eight-week internship for eligible Service Leavers, followed by a two-year fixed term role, supported by a Veterans Advocate mentor.

- The [Further Forces programme](#), supported by the Department for Education, which aims to recruit Service Leavers with knowledge, skills and experience in science, engineering and technology to be trained as teachers in the further education sector.
- [Skills Development Scotland's](#) establishment of a Veterans' Champions network to support Service Leavers and veterans along their employment pathway.
- The Welsh Government's [Employment Pathway](#), aimed at helping veterans navigate the civilian labour market. Additionally, the Welsh Government, in collaboration with Business in the Community Cymru, also launched its [Employers' Toolkit](#), providing guidance to employers on the benefits of recruiting veterans.
- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, [the 2020 Annual Covenant report](#) highlighted efforts made by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to utilise virtual methods of providing employment support to Service Leavers. Furthermore, the Armed Forces Covenant business and community networks have provided their support to employers of mobilised Reservists, and promoted employment support services to veterans and military families.

2.2 New research findings (up to the end of 2020)

Since the original Snapshot was published in 2018, a number of research reports have emerged. Following their [2016 'Veterans Work' report](#), Deloitte published a follow-on report in 2018, ['Veterans Work: Moving on'](#), which examined the factors that motivate veterans when making the transition from the military to the civilian job market. Additionally, [a report](#) published in 2020 investigated the difficulties experienced by veterans in translating and promoting their transferable military skills to civilian employers, while recommendations for improving the approach taken towards supporting veterans to gain employment were [previously offered in 2019](#).

Research has also been published identifying the employment needs of the following specific groups of Service Leavers: [Senior Non-Commissioned Officers \(SNCOs\)](#); [Service Leavers over the age of 50](#); [female veterans](#); [veterans in Northern Ireland](#) and [self-employed veterans](#). These reports identified specific challenges and barriers to employment experienced by these groups, summarised below:

- Veteran SNCOs [are reported](#) to fare relatively well in gaining employment after leaving the military. However, a reluctance to leave their senior military roles can result in a lack of engagement in resettlement services, and unrealistic expectations of civilian salaries.
- Those that leave the AF after the age of 50 [reported](#) struggling to adapt to the civilian job-seeking process and experiencing negative stereotyping from employers related to their age and military background.
- [Female veterans reported](#) lower levels of employment than males and inadequate resettlement support that does not meet their needs. Employers were found to be favourable towards employing female veterans, but indicated that female veterans undervalued themselves, and discounted themselves from skilled jobs they may be suited to.

- [Veterans in Northern Ireland](#) reportedly experience difficulties gaining employment and accessing support, often due to security concerns associated with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict.
- Skills and competencies gained during military employment are [reported](#) to suit self-employment among Service Leavers. However, the same [research](#) found there is a lack of information and advice regarding self-employment in the current resettlement provision.

Academic papers have been published focused on [veterans seeking help for mental health problems](#) and the [difficulties experienced by injured veterans in gaining employment](#).

An [academic paper published in 2019](#) reported that claiming benefits post-Service is related to socioeconomic rather than military service factors. [A report funded by FiMT](#) highlighted poor experience of the benefits system for veterans and a lack of understanding from staff within the Department of Work and Pensions of the challenges faced by ex-Service personnel.

3 Methods

For the original Snapshot, a review was undertaken of the available UK evidence concerning Serving personnel and veterans and employment issues, using standard reviewing techniques such as searching electronic databases, hand searching of references from relevant articles and reports and a review of websites from government and relevant organisations. The review was limited to studies undertaken since the release of the first [FiMT Transition Mapping Study](#) and drew upon existing literature reviews for pre-2013 studies. A substantial number of peer-reviewed articles were identified from the US. However, due to differences in transition and resettlement policies and support for veterans in the US compared to the UK, these have not been included in this Snapshot.

For the 2020 update the same methods were undertaken and 15 new academic papers and research reports were identified. Up to date [Ministry of Defence \(MOD\) and the Career Transition Partnership \(CTP\) Service Leaver employment statistics](#) were used to identify level and type of employment among veterans. Additionally, the [2019](#) and [2020 Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report](#) and the [Strategy for Our Veterans](#) were used to identify up-to-date policy relating to veterans' employment. New research findings and policy are outlined in the What's New Section above, as well as within relevant sections throughout the remainder of this document. Due to the use of hyperlinks in this report, all references cited are restricted to those openly available online.

4 Employment support whilst in-Service

4.1 Key Findings

- Service personnel are provided with a number of opportunities to gain qualifications and training throughout their military career.
- Service personnel are encouraged to complete personal development plans (PDPs) during their military service, but some struggle to keep up with this due to workload.

- Spouses of Service personnel experience unique barriers to employment and appear to benefit from targeted employment support services.

4.2 Demographics

Based on [MOD data](#), the typical recruit is likely to be 16-18 at age of entry into the AF, of white ethnicity and predominantly male. For the Army, recruits are more likely to be from a low socio-economic background. [Up to 50%](#) of Army recruits have literacy and numeracy skills below the standard expected of primary school leavers at age 11. Low literacy and numeracy skills can constitute a serious barrier to wider employment as acknowledged in the [Wolf Report on Vocational Education](#). This report placed significant emphasis on the need for these skills, highlighting that qualifications in them 'are fundamental to young people's employment and education prospects' (p. 8).

4.3 Information and advice

The UK AF provide specialist training and continuing professional development opportunities for those in the [Army](#), [Royal Air Force](#) and [Royal Navy/Royal Marines](#). The AF are currently the largest apprenticeship provider in the UK, and in 2020 the [British Army was rated as the best apprenticeship employer in the country](#).

The UK AF also provide a learning environment with a wide range of [qualifications available](#) that not only enhance a military career, but that civilian employers should find desirable. Those in the military can study to obtain General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced (A) Level qualifications, or their equivalents. [Learning credits](#) and other funding opportunities are available to serving personnel and veterans, subject to eligibility.

[The Veterans' Transition Review](#) highlighted the importance of Service personnel maintaining a PDP which records the training, skills and experience they acquire throughout Service. However, [research with Service Leavers over the age of 50](#), published in 2020, suggested that many Service personnel struggle to complete their PDP due to demanding workloads. This was particularly difficult for those stationed overseas, who found it hard to access personal development courses.

4.4 Partner employment support

The impact that serving in the military has on the whole family's employment opportunities, are of concern also. Partners of AF personnel reportedly experience [unique challenges in both gaining and maintaining employment](#), with frequent relocation often cited as a barrier to long-term employment and pension funds. Between 2015 and 2017, the MOD trialled an employment support programme ([the Spouse Employment Support \[SES\] Trial](#)) with the primary purpose of helping spouses of AF personnel access employment at a level appropriate to their skills, knowledge and experience.

The [Veterans & Families Institute for Military Social Research](#) worked with the [Forces in Mind Trust \(FiMT\)](#) to complete an evaluation of the MOD's SES Trial. The resulting [report](#) and associated [academic paper](#) found that receiving employment support has a largely positive effect on military spouses, in terms of providing them with training, opportunities for personal enhancement and career development, and in making them feel more valued.

In October 2020, the MOD launched a new employment support programme for military family members, the [Partner Career Support Programme](#), which aimed to provide bespoke professional career advice in support of 750 partners over a six-month period.

5 Transition and resettlement

5.1 Key findings

- Resettlement support is provided to Service Leavers by the MOD in partnership with the CTP, however some do not engage with these services, which are not compulsory.
- Research suggested that resettlement support may not be meeting the needs of all Service Leavers (i.e., female veterans, and the self-employed).
- Additional employment support is available to Service personnel in transition from a number of military charity initiatives.
- Whilst over 6000 businesses have now signed the Armed Forces Covenant, there is still a lack of awareness of the Covenant, particularly amongst smaller organisations.

5.2 Resettlement support

It was [estimated](#) that there were 936,000 working age veterans living in the UK in 2017. Numbers [leaving each year](#) have reduced from 20,000 in 2015 to just over 14,000 in 2020.

Preparation for future employment is a key aspect of transition and the MOD provides ‘resettlement’ support via [CTP](#) (see the [Tri-Service Resettlement Policy](#) for full details). It should be noted that CTP services are not compulsory and subsequently there will be Service Leavers who will be discharged having never elected to access this form of support. The [most recent CTP statistics](#) suggested that 21% of Regular personnel who left the AF in the financial year 2018/19 did not use a CTP service.

Research also suggested barriers to engagement with resettlement are experienced by some Service Leavers, thereby indicating such services may not be meeting their needs. A [research report](#) published in April 2020 focused on SNCO Service Leavers and found that those who were reluctant to leave the Services were also reluctant to engage with the resettlement programme. Additional barriers to engagement with the resettlement process reported by SNCO veterans included a lack of satisfaction with the courses available, difficulties accessing training courses in some geographic locations, a lack of support from commanding officers and a lack of peer mentors to provide realistic advice on the civilian labour market. The report recommended that the MOD should consider making practical transition workshops compulsory for those leaving and continue to provide support if veterans struggle with unemployment long term.

Prior to that, [a 2019 report](#) recommended that the MOD build in conversations about transition throughout Serving Personnel’s careers and include peer mentoring from veterans who have successfully entered the civilian labour market as part of the resettlement process.

Furthermore, two reports published in 2018 and 2019 highlighted areas in which current resettlement provision may not be meeting the needs of certain groups of Service Leavers. The [first](#) drew attention to a lack of information and advice about self-employment in current resettlement provision, while the [second](#) found that only a minority of female Service Leavers felt that they had received adequate resettlement support. This report further highlighted that support provided during transition was not tailored to meet women's needs. The authors recommended that the MOD consider developing support specifically for female Service Leavers, including advice on flexible working and for occupations outside those typically seen as employing ex-Service personnel.

5.3 Charitable and private sector support

In addition to the support outlined above, there are a wide range of initiatives to assist ex-Service personnel into employment, both from the charity and private sectors. Since 2011, the Government has encouraged businesses, charitable and public sector organisations to sign the [Armed Forces Covenant](#), to demonstrate their commitment to supporting the AF community and providing employment and other opportunities to veterans.

To date, more than [6000 organisations have signed](#) the Covenant. However, a [2019 report](#) found that only 24% of UK businesses surveyed had heard of the Covenant, and smaller organisations were less likely to be aware of it, to sign it, or to take action to support veteran employment as a result. The same report recommended raising awareness both of the Covenant and the benefits to businesses of employing veterans, partly by encouraging participation in the [Defence Employer Recognition Scheme \(ERS\)](#), which aims to encourage not just the employment veterans, but also their family members (it also encourages recognition of the value of employing serving Reservists, as well as flexibility in accommodating their military obligations).

A [2017 report](#) focused specifically on those charities providing employment support and found that 59 AF charities were offering this. The most popular employment-support service delivered by charities was found to be employment advice, which was offered by 61% of those charities, while 39% offered recruitment services, such as access to recruitment consultants and job-seeking support.

6 Employment and support for veterans

6.1 Key findings

- Veterans reportedly generally enjoy good employment outcomes, experiencing higher employment rates than the UK general population.
- Employment outcomes in veterans appear to differ by rank, Service branch, gender, ethnicity and age. Veterans with health difficulties, female veterans and older veterans may need additional employment support.
- ESLs (particularly those who leave before completing basic training) appear to be particularly vulnerable to poor employment outcomes.

- Difficulties in translating qualifications and skills gained during military service for the civilian workplace are a common barrier reported across different studies of Service Leavers.
- Additional barriers to employment for veterans include living rurally or in specific geographic locations (e.g., Northern Ireland) and being older on discharge.
- Research suggested that some civilian employers may hold negative perceptions and stereotypes of veterans that may impact on their recruitment.
- Service Leavers often appear to have unrealistic expectations of the salary and role they will be able to achieve in the civilian labour market.
- Whilst a very low proportion of veterans currently claim long term unemployment benefits, those that do report a poor experience of the benefits system.
- Research found that a range of skills and expertise developed during military service has the potential to plug skills shortages in the civilian labour market. However, it recommended that the development of strategies to match veterans' skillsets with appropriate employers is needed.

6.2 What does employment for veterans look like?

When this Snapshot was first published in 2018, UK employment had reached its joint highest level since 1975, and lowest levels of unemployment at 4.2%. However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a sharp increase in unemployment in the UK, which reached 4.9% in October 2020. The resulting impact of this on ex-Service personnel in the UK is currently unknown.

MOD data derived from the CTP provides statistics on the employment outcomes among Service Leavers. Of the Service personnel who left the UK AF in 2018/2019 and used a CTP service (based on a 64% response rate), 86% were employed (an increase of 4% since the first Snapshot was published), 6% were unemployed and 8% were economically inactive, up to six months after leaving Service. These statistics are supported by recent survey data collected by Deloitte, published in 2018. Veteran employment appears to be higher than that of the UK general population, which was 75.6% as of October 2020. Additionally, MOD data suggested that approximately 4% of veterans were self-employed within six months of using the resettlement services provided by CTP. A report for FiMT in 2018 found that ex-Service personnel felt the skills and competencies gained during military service were particularly useful for self-employment.

Survey data collected in 2014 suggested there are veterans who either find themselves without full or part-time work, or who are in employment that does not fully utilise the skills and education they acquired whilst serving. The same data also suggested that an estimated 60,000 members of the ex-Service community were underemployed and had taken a job for which they felt overqualified or underpaid. Despite this, data from the MOD's Annual Population Survey in 2017, and CTP data from 2018/19 suggested that veterans are no more likely to be unemployed than non-veterans. However, there is not yet any published data on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on veterans' employment in the UK.

The Annual Population Survey also provided the following information on the position of veterans' employment, in comparison to civilian employment. The highest proportion of veterans worked in

‘Associate Professional and Technical’ roles (19%), compared to the highest proportion of civilians working in ‘Professional Occupations’ (21%). Veterans were significantly more likely to work in ‘Public Admin and Defence’ (11% vs 6%) according to the same data. This includes civilian roles within the MOD, Prison Service, NHS, Police and Fire Services.

It also reported veteran employment by gender and profession as follows:

Profession	Male (%)	Female (%)
Manufacturing	16	4
Construction	12	2
Transport and storage	12	2
Skilled trade	18	1
Process, plant and machine operative	17	1
Health and social care	7	29
Education	5	11
Administrative and secretarial	4	19
Caring, leisure and other	3	13

While veterans were to be found across the employment landscape, a 2015 [report](#) detailed the sectors typically seen to offer employment to ex-Service personnel as being security (including high-risk security opportunities in the Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa); marine protection and, specifically for those with medical training, the health sector. Other sectors that were growing in popularity for veteran employment included communications, IT, the utility sector (including oil and gas), retail and the supply chain.

6.3 Veteran groups vulnerable to poor employment outcomes

Whilst veterans in general appear to achieve positive employment outcomes, the MOD’s [Annual Population Survey](#) indicated that certain groups are less likely to have obtained employment six months post-discharge, including women and non-UK Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) Service Leavers.

Employment rates by gender:

Gender	Estimated employment rate (% 6 months post discharge)
Male	87
Female	76

Employment rates by ethnicity:

Ethnicity	Estimated employment rate (% 6 months post discharge)
Non-UK BAME	50
UK BAME	78
White	87

A [recent report](#) focused on female Service Leavers highlighted that whilst employment rates in ex-Servicewomen were lower than ex-Servicemen, they were similar to civilian women (female veterans: 72% vs. female civilians: 69%). However, 68% of the ex-Servicewomen in this study who were not in employment wanted to be. The authors suggested that female veterans experienced dual challenges related to employment: those associated with being a veteran and those experiences by women in society in general.

A [2018 report published by Deloitte found](#) that 27% of ex-Servicewomen surveyed experienced finding a job as 'very difficult', compared to 17% of ex-Servicemen. For those veterans who were employed, almost a third of women reported earning less than they expected, compared to a quarter of men. Reasons for these difficulties are discussed in a [2019 report](#), in which ex-Servicewomen reported cultural stereotypes associated with being a female veteran, such as being 'too military' or masculine, that impact on employers' perceptions of the competencies and skills that they may bring to employment. Additionally, it was felt by employers that female veterans were more likely than male veterans to discount job opportunities for which they did not meet all the criteria but may still be suitable. Furthermore, female veteran [SNCOs reported](#) struggling to sell themselves to employers, while lacking self-confidence.

Differences in employment outcomes by rank and Service branch are also reported. [Research](#) suggested that those who were non-commissioned on discharge were more likely to struggle to find work than commissioned officers. [Data published in 2016](#) indicated that Army Service Leavers were 12% more likely to be unemployed than those leaving the Royal Navy (7%) and RAF (7%). Service Leavers of officer rank were significantly more likely than other ranks (28% to 8% respectively) to find employment in professional occupations. Within [a sample of veteran SNCOs](#), those from the Royal Navy had the highest level of unemployment, followed by the Army. However, Army veterans were most likely to find it more difficult to adapt to the civilian workplace and reported more mental health challenges that impacted on this further, compared to the other Service branches. No data was available to compare employment outcomes for SNCOs to junior Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) in this study.

Leaving the AF over the age of 50 [was also associated with poor employment outcomes](#): 13% were unable to find a job six months after discharge; 20% were working in non-permanent positions and 41% were applying for jobs below their skill level.

Data suggested that veterans with [physical](#) or [mental health](#) problems were more likely to report being unemployed. Furthermore, [a qualitative study of injured veterans](#) found that over half of the sample reported difficulties in sustaining consistent employment, and discussed the practical and psychological difficulties of maintaining employment with a disability. [Survey data](#) also indicated that

not being in employment due to ill health was predicted by experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among veterans. Additionally, a 2016 [report](#) drew attention to mental health as a potential major barrier to employment. A programme known as Individual Placement and Support ([IPS](#)) appears to be regarded as a suitable method by which all people with mental and physical health problems can be supported into employment.

6.4 Early Service Leavers

ESLs have been reported as having [a higher risk of poor transition outcomes](#). As a result of this recognition, the MOD provides a [Future Horizons](#) programme specifically for ESLs. While a 2013 [report](#) indicated high positive employment outcomes for participants, there is, however, a lack of research into the specific needs of those leaving the AF early, including in differentiating between different lengths and types of service within the overarching ESL cohort. This was an issue similarly identified in a 2018 [paper](#), which suggested that ESLs who do not complete basic training are more likely to report concerns about their transferable skills and finding a job, as compared to fully trained ESLs.

6.5 Barriers to employment

[Research](#) published in 2016 found that veterans encountered difficulty in translating skills and qualifications acquired in-Service into an effective application for civilian employment; issues also reported in the 2013 [Transition Mapping Study](#), the 2014 [Veterans' Transition Review](#), and in the 2016 [Employment in Mind](#) report.

More recently, [a report published in 2020](#) similarly found that while civilian employers desire the skillsets that veterans can offer, veterans struggle to communicate their transferable skills. The same study indicated that 36% of employers surveyed found veterans' curriculum vitae (CVs) and application forms difficult to understand, and that they did not adequately convey how their military skillsets were transferable. Furthermore, 56% of the veteran respondents felt that employers did not fully understand the skills they could bring from their military service. As a result, between a third and half of veterans surveyed reported that they felt underemployed in comparison to their desired employment outcome. Employers were keen to resolve this issue, with 60% agreeing that their organisation would benefit from a solution that would enable them to easily identify veterans' transferable skills, resulting in a recommendation that a framework be established to develop, translate and communicate military skills to the civilian labour market.

Such a framework was recently presented by the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#), aimed at helping veterans determine how their qualifications fit into the civilian qualification framework in Scotland. However, [it has been criticised](#) as limited in scope and effect.

Barriers to employment are highlighted in recent research for [veterans living rurally](#), and that difficulties in obtaining employment were dependent on where Service Leavers chose to live once they had left the AF. Over a quarter of veterans living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland reported that finding their desired job had been 'very difficult', and a similar proportion of those living in the North of England also reported this. This was considerably higher in comparison to those living in the South of England, with just 9% of veterans living in London reporting that this was 'very difficult' (p. 9). Furthermore, veterans preferred to live rurally, and over half of those surveyed said

they did not want to move for their job. Accordingly, the report concludes that a sizeable portion of veterans may be missing job opportunities due to a preference to live outside areas offering higher employment opportunities and an unwillingness to commute. Consequently, it recommended that employers should consider offering more opportunities for veterans to work from home.

Research also suggested veterans from Northern Ireland experience unique barriers to employment, due to the security concerns associated with the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. Continuing political tensions and a perception of negative public attitudes towards veterans led to a lack of trust in civilians for some, and reluctance to go to support services for help.

Veterans who leave the AF over the age of 50 are unlikely to have engaged in the civilian labour market for many years, and reported struggling to navigate the process of obtaining employment. A 2020 study found that 21% of Service Leavers over the age of 50 revealed that their CV writing skills were poor, and 44% lacked confidence in negotiating their salary and terms of employment. Some also reported struggling to understand the practice of job seeking, such as those concerned with interviews. Furthermore, many reported obtaining several different jobs since leaving the AF, and recommended that other Service Leavers should be prepared to adopt a similar approach before finding a position that suited their skills.

Research also suggested employers considering hiring veterans could be dissuaded from doing so due to concerns over the mental health of ex-Service personnel. These concerns appeared to be alleviated once employers had experienced hiring veterans, but the report acknowledged it was a challenge to engage employers in the first place. Accordingly, it recognised that there is a need to counter some employers' attitudes towards employing veterans, as well as assisting veterans to better present their skills and strengths through better crafted CVs, applications and interviews.

6.6 Employer perceptions and stereotyping

Aside from perceptions of veterans' mental health issues, several reports in the UK highlighted other employer preconceptions of veterans. A 2016 report indicated that organisations that have employed veterans were positive about the skills veterans bring, and observed that veterans appear to take fewer days off due to health issues. However, recent research suggested that veterans may experience additional negative stereotyping by employers based on their age. In a report focused on those who leave the AF after the age of 50, 30% reported experiencing ageism from employers, and 28% reported that they experienced negative attitudes towards ex-military personnel. Similarly, in a sample of SNCO veterans, respondents felt that employers were less willing to take on and train older veterans, and perceived older veterans as being 'institutionalised' (p. 78). In contrast, female SNCO veterans were reportedly less likely to encounter negative attitudes from employers.

A previous study focused uniquely on female veterans' employment found that while civilian employers were favourable towards employing ex-Service personnel in general, it praised female veterans in particular for their forward planning and preparation, administration and organisation. However, employers felt that female veterans undervalued themselves, and consequently focused on instituting peer support for ex-military recruits, often pairing women veterans with women mentors.

Additionally, and as found by the 2016 'Employment in Mind' report, the negative stereotyping of ex-Service personnel can be acutely felt by veteran job seekers. The Veterans' Transition Review

recommended that the Government should ‘be more proactive in countering negative misconceptions and stereotypes that can create an extra barrier to Service Leavers finding work’ (p. 20), and further suggested the need for greater co-ordination in the relationship between the MOD and industry to promote Service Leaver recruitment and to encourage the creation of transition work placements. Furthermore, [stakeholder discussions](#) in 2019 recommended that a combined strategy was required to change public misconception of veterans, with collaborative effort from the MOD, the public sector and private organisations to share best practice. Specifically, the report suggested the development of training for Human Resources departments on the recruitment of veterans, a guaranteed interview scheme for veterans, and a mapping exercise of key military skills and qualifications to offer a better understanding to employers.

6.7 Veterans’ perceptions and preferences

Some Service Leavers reportedly harbour [unrealistic salary expectations](#), with more than half reporting that their civilian salary differed from their expectations prior to transition. Further [research](#) findings also indicated a lack of civilian jobs that meet the salary expectations of SNCO veterans.

The 2017 [Transition Mapping Study](#) noted that some expectation management might assist Service Leavers to be better prepared for the number of applications and interviews required to secure a job, at what level of seniority they can expect to work, and offer them a realistic idea of likely salary range. The study further suggested that a competitive civilian job market, along with difficulties in translating skillsets and qualifications, can lead to an expectations gap. However, in a subsequent [study](#), 70% of veterans under the age of 30 reported looking for jobs with the potential for career progression.

In a sample of veterans who left the AF over the age of 50, the main priorities when looking for employment were [reported as](#) finding a role that is: interesting; utilises their skills; and one that makes them feel valued. [Female veterans similarly reported](#) a preference for work that enables them to use the experience and skills that they developed during military service. Salary and location were also key factors considered during job-seeking for women.

6.8 Veterans and state benefits

See our [Finance Snapshot](#).

6.9 The economic benefits of employing veterans

The [Employer Skills Survey](#) indicated ‘over two-thirds of employers that had difficulty filling their vacancies solely as a result of skill shortages had experienced a direct financial impact through either loss of business to competitors, or increased operating costs’ (p. 13). The same survey further stated that veterans are seen as highly trained and experienced in a range of skills, which could be harnessed to help meet this current shortage of skills. [Furthermore](#), there is reportedly an overlap between the areas of highest skill shortages and certain skills and experience acquired and developed within the AF, including: chefs (17% of all skilled trades’ skill-shortage vacancies), metal working production and maintenance fitters (13%) and vehicle technicians, and mechanics and electricians (13%). Accordingly, a 2020 [report](#) suggested that the skills shortage in the civilian labour

market could be filled by capitalising on skills developed during military service. In this study, 70% of employers surveyed felt that their sector was facing skills shortages, and 63% felt this was true for their organisation. Three-quarters of employers reported that there was a desire within their organisation to hire veterans, however there was also a consensus that veterans found it difficult to communicate desired skills to employers (as discussed above). Furthermore, the top six skills desired by employers surveyed for this report aligned with the top six identified by veterans, indicating that employers are not engaging effectively with veterans and that veterans are failing to sell their skills.

[A report](#) arising from a stakeholder discussion event held in 2019 highlighted the importance of partnership development between local government and employers to support the recruitment of veterans, citing the [BuildForce programme](#) as an example. This partnership between employers, industry bodies, and charities is aimed at helping veterans find sustainable employment in the construction sector across the UK. As a growing sector which requires a specific skillset, BuildForce aims to match veterans' transferable skills to those desired by the construction industry. The programme reported successfully helping over 500 veterans into employment so far and has funding until 2022.

7 Conclusion

Numerous vocational and academic qualifications can be undertaken while serving in the AF and during the period of transition, and a range of employment support is provided by the MOD, its partners, and private and charity organisations.

MOD and CTP statistics indicate employment outcomes among veterans that compare favourably to the general population. However, certain groups appear to struggle more to gain fulfilling employment, including female veterans, BAME veterans, older veterans, and veterans with physical and mental health disabilities. Only a minority of veterans claim unemployment benefits, and this is often related to socio-economic issues rather than military service.

Common barriers to employment for veterans include difficulties in translating skills and qualifications for the civilian labour market, unrealistic salary expectations and negative employer preconceptions of veterans.

Veterans develop a range of skillsets during military service that have the potential to fill significant skills shortages in the civilian labour market. However, strategies are needed to enable veterans to better translate their skills, so that employers to better understand the benefits of recruiting veterans.

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