GoodPeople™

A Better Working Future for Ex-Service Personnel

A collaborative approach to employment of the ex-Service community, in partnership with Forces in Mind Trust

Matthew Fellows

Joss Hunt

Richard Tyrie

FiMT
forces in mind trust
SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION

COMMUNITY FUND

Report Preface
October 2020

This report was researched and drafted between September 2019 and February 2020. It was therefore completed before the impact of Covid-19 in the UK, and during a period of record low unemployment. The opposite is now true – Covid-19 has precipitated the largest spike in unemployment in since 2009, and plunged the UK into an almost immediate recession. It is expected that these challenges will remain for the foreseeable future, as the Institute for Employment Studies estimate the labour market will take 7 years to return to pre-Covid employment rates.

However, while the report itself is focused on pre-Covid labour market conditions, it is our belief that the findings contained here are even more relevant and important in a post-Covid UK economy. This report focused on the challenges and barriers ex-Service personnel experience *even during a buoyant labour market*, with low unemployment. With growing unemployment and reduced recruitment however, these issues will only be amplified and exacerbated. It is therefore of even greater importance that employers, policymakers, civil society and local communities work together to understand the barriers faced, and collaborate on shared solutions to help support ex-Service personnel into careers they deserve.

**Richard Tyrie,
CEO, GoodPeople**

Air Vice-Marshal Ray Lock CBE, Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

I've known Good People for over 5 years, and have admired their approach to realising the social capital of disadvantaged communities throughout that time. When they started discussing with Forces in Mind Trust whether there was a contribution they could make to supporting the Armed Forces Community, naturally I was curious; but it took years of refining and aligning to deliver what is in effect the first stage of a project at whose heart is delivering fulfilling employment to the ex-Service community, to the benefit of the business community.

Transformational is an expression rather too readily attached to sometimes modest projects. But as we try to understand how the world post COVID-19 will have changed, it seems a good time to identify those that really will deliver systemic improvements. Here, Good People have identified a series of ways to increase the level of fulfilled employment for those leaving the Armed Forces. The report lists 8 recommendations, all of them sensible and forward looking.

It would probably be fair to argue that many of the recommendations for improvement are frustratingly familiar: collaboration; skills mapping; mentoring and employment support; articulation of the value of a veteran. These seem to be enduring calls, and no doubt some agencies will argue that much has already been done. Perhaps. But their continued presence on the 'To Do' list of our employment programme suggests just that – there is more to do.

Nestling within this report though is a truly radical proposal – the retirement of the CV as a means of brokering an introduction between an employer and an aspirational employee. The technology delivering its replacement – a matching service that connects suitable candidates with searching employers – is well tried. But making the conceptual leap of faith to entrust that initial contact to a machine is far harder. Harder, but also more rewarding both for the business that gets hold of a valuable contributor, and for the ex-Service person whose potential can be properly unlocked to deliver a proper, fulfilled civilian life. Who is bold enough to lead in this transformation?

Professor Paul Ivey,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Business
Officer, London South Bank University

This is not simply another study on how to support the ex- service community transition into civilian life. Whilst there is good work done in this respect both within the military and without, the need remains vital and a breakthrough is needed. GoodPeople have used their leading experience in transformation to look afresh at the challenges.

The research focuses on SMEs but the challenges experienced by large and complex organisations like my University are similar in terms of engaging, accessing and hiring ex-Service talent. Timing is opportune as the UK itself transitions through several significant challenges, exacerbated by the significant impact of Covid-19 on the labour market. Workplace skills of resilience, team work, integrity, and outcome focussed application have never been needed more, and our ex-service community and their spouses have these in abundance.

For a London University committed to 'place and impact' for corporate and community engagement alike, and an ERS Gold award holder, we deliver a leading influencer role for London and organisationally seek to attract ever more ex-Service talent. Experience has taught us they are great employees. GoodPeople's recommendations are worth a read, they may suggest a solution to you, and importantly they may also help your organisation build systemic sustainable solutions to secure this breakthrough.

Mike Cherry OBE, National Chairman, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)

I have believed for a very long time that service leavers bring with them a unique set of skills that would be of benefit to many small and micro businesses. Yet matching the two together - leavers to vacancies - remains one of the biggest challenges alongside that of understanding the skills themselves.

On entering the civilian workforce, the skills our service leavers bring with them are leadership, people management, determination and a strong work ethic amongst others. They are often the best people to thrive in team working and their experience in the Armed Forces will have left them with a strong problem-solving quality. They tend to be adaptable and are often highly functional in a crisis. These attributes lend themselves particularly well to employment in a small business.

Small businesses are known to be a more supportive environment for many and can often be better than larger ones at spotting and nurturing talent. Rather than discarding a service leaver's job application because some of their skills and qualifications don't 'tick the box' they will take people on because they believe in the individual. But there is room for greater support and advice to service leavers on the options when they are preparing to leave, and that should include looking to small and micro businesses. This is particularly relevant as a result of Covid-19 creating even more challenging conditions - small businesses will need additional support to help engage and employ talented service leavers.

Alongside this, small business employers would benefit from a simplified way of understanding and recognising the equivalence between military skills and civilian qualifications. For those service leavers in need of further training and qualifications to achieve their post-military ambitions, there should be more financial support available. The recently introduced one-year holiday from Employer National Insurance Contributions for smaller businesses employing a veteran, following FSB's lobbying work on this, will be a huge motivator.

Adapting from military to civilian life and work is a big transition, but with the right guidance and support more service leavers would be able join Britain's small business community, utilising the skills they have learnt as they move forwards in their career path, and adding to Britain's economic prosperity. This report is a welcome addition to the dialogue around how we - as a united force that includes small businesses, military charities, and Government - can propel that forward.

Executive Summary

Background and Aims

Employment of ex-Service personnel remains one of the principle challenges for all organisations looking to ensure that ex-Service personnel and their families can build successful civilian lives. But the world of work is changing faster than ever before. The types of jobs available as well as the skills needed to do them are changing faster than many people can keep up with. Combined with effects of an ageing workforce, automation, a growing skills shortage and the impacts of the UK's exit from the EU, navigating the UK jobs market is as difficult and confusing as it has ever been.

Despite UK unemployment being at its lowest rate in decades, ex-Service personnel continue to experience barriers to finding good work. Research suggests employers still don't sufficiently understand or appreciate the skills ex-Service personnel have to offer, which has a significant and negative impact on the types of roles they are considered for. In addition, underemployment in the UK is an increasing concern across the labour market. Office for National Statistics research suggests the percentage of workers who want more hours, or workers who want better jobs, is nearly double the unemployment rate, at about 9.7%, or 3.3 million people. This report therefore aims to investigate how this trend extends to the ex-Service community. Coupled with this, the volume of employers actively engaging with ex-Service employment support providers is still relatively low, reducing choice and

opportunity for ex-Service personnel, and reducing the likelihood of a 'best fit' match for employers. This is particularly evident with the 5.8m SMEs, who represent 99% of UK companies but are failing to engage and employ ex-Service personnel at scale.

This context reflects a dual challenge:

- The lack of understanding and appreciation of the transferable skills, competencies and experience from the military by employers

- The difficulty of employers, particularly SMEs, in accessing the ex-Service talent pool

Taken together and in an increasingly uncertain labour market, these factors create the potential for ex-Service personnel to miss out on careers that are resilient, motivating, lucrative, offer development and make the most of their valuable skill sets.

GoodPeople was therefore commissioned by Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) to better investigate these trends and look at possible collaborative solutions. The aim of this report was to evaluate skills transfer and employment access barriers between the ex-Service community and SMEs and explore systemic opportunities to overcome these barriers through innovation and collaboration.

GoodPeople and Forces in Mind Trust

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) is a lottery-funded charity that awards grants and commissions research, coordinates the efforts of others, and supports projects that deliver long-term solutions to the challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community. Their Vision is that all ex-Service personnel and their families lead successful and fulfilled civilian lives, and their Mission is to enable them to make a successful and sustainable transition.

GoodPeople are a social enterprise who are working to enable people, places and organisations to thrive, by intelligently connecting talent and opportunity. They combine research, insight, and tech-driven solutions to help build an open and inclusive labour market, that works for everyone.

Methodology and Process

The research and consultations were undertaken by GoodPeople using a mixed methods approach, working with both SME employers as well as ex-Service personnel of all ages, service lengths, backgrounds and employment statuses as well as their spouses/partners. The research was place-based and geographically bound, focusing on the Solent area - Southampton, Portsmouth, Gosport and the surrounding area. The focus of the research from a cohort perspective of ex-Service personnel was firmly those who were 2 years and upwards post discharge. The cohort in resettlement or transition and the services provided to them contractually or charitably are not explicitly explored here.

The process undertaken began with initial desk research and consultations, followed by quantitative survey responses and qualitative interviews and focus groups. This elicited 411 total responses across surveys, interviews and focus groups, and involved a total of 89 employers, 197 ex-Service personnel and 23 spouses/partners.

Alongside this research process, GoodPeople undertook an analysis of the current methods of military-commercial skills translation being used in the UK, their level of effectiveness, and any opportunities for collaborative innovation in this space. Specifically, this meant investigating the feasibility of a practical and ambitious project, to better connect ex-Service personnel and the organisations supporting them (including the MoD, veteran charities and other brokers) with employers and their opportunities. The results of this feasibility assessment, though still early, demonstrate clear appetite among business leaders, military organisations and other stakeholders to collaborate more effectively around military-commercial skills translation as a way of better connecting the military community to employers.

Research Findings and Conclusions

1   Acute skill shortages, wider labour market challenges and increasing interest in employing ex-Service personnel together reflect a real opportunity for the ex-Service community.

- 93% of employer respondents stated that sourcing the right skills and talent is critical to their future growth and success.

- 70% identified that their industry sector was facing skills shortages and 65% identified the same for their own organisation.

- 74% identified an organisational desire to access and hire from the ex-Service community. This was more than 91% when segmented to identify those respondents whose organisation currently employs ex-Service personnel.

2   Strong performance in commercial roles, and a set of skills which closely match those demanded by employers, clearly demonstrate the value of armed forces experience.

- Of the 34 general purpose skills in the O*NET skills taxonomy, the top six most demanded by the employers surveyed aligned with the top 6 which ex-Service personnel identified they had gained in service. These were:

  - Active Listening
  - Time Management
  - Critical Thinking
  - Speaking
  - Judgement & Decision Making
  - Complex Problem Solving

- 70% of employer respondents (100% of ERS committed respondents) identified that in their organisations' experience ex-Service personnel made great employees.

3   Despite this, employers (and SME employers in particular) are failing to engage the ex-Service community at scale.

- 33% of employer respondents reported their organisation found it difficult to engage with the ex-Service community and 27% found the same with ex-Service organisations and intermediaries.

- Only half of the ERS committed employers surveyed identified it as a proven route to accessing ex-Service talent pools.

- 69% of employer respondents (79% of ERS committed respondents) identified their organisation would be interested in exploring the benefits of a future model that provided access to and engagement of ex-Service talent.

4   Ex-Service personnel are failing to communicate their skills effectively in the current CV-driven recruitment paradigm - and employers are failing to appreciate them as a result.

- The current recruitment paradigm is aimed at mitigating risk, not identifying value. The purpose of a CV is to communicate the value of the applicant, when the receiving recruitment decision maker is seeking to mitigate risk.

- 36% of employer respondents identified that the CVs and application forms of ex-Service personnel were difficult to understand and identify the transferable skills gained from the military.

- Between a third and a half of ex-Service personnel are in some way underemployed in comparison to their aspiration and the identified factors that influence it.

- Effective military-commercial 'skills translation' is a significant gap in current service provision.

- 22% of ex-Service respondents felt their transferable military skills were not being fully utilised in their civilian employment.

- Almost 56% of respondents said that they did not think employers fully understand the skills they could bring from military service.

- 60% of employer respondents identified their organisation would benefit from a solution that made it easier to identify and understand the transferable skills of ex-Service personnel.

5   Networking, social capital and other forms of experiential support are hugely effective in supporting ex-Service personnel into good work.

- Ex-Service personnel with well-developed social networks and therefore social capital were significantly more likely to be in work they identified as meeting their aspirations than those without, as well as having achieved such an outcome more quickly.

- Employers also reported that their organisations had an appetite to offer employment related opportunities - with 55% interested in offering work experience, 33% apprenticeships, 33% mentoring, 29% knowledge and skills sharing, and 28% wider employability support.

- This appetite to offer 'exposure' opportunities that mutually benefit both partners and reflect the preference of SMEs to recruit 'known entities' is a key opportunity.

6 The importance of lived service experience, and therefore of peer-to-peer support from ex-Service personnel, is crucial.

- Learning from those with more experience and those who have gone/done before is reflective of how knowledge is built in service.

- Aligning this with the trust inherent in individuals with whom there is a lived experience connection (of service) and therefore trust, both in a formal and informal setting, was widely suggested as the best route to managing expectations and developing knowledge.

- This was especially true when focused on specific industries, roles, and employers.

7 Prototypes do exist for better connecting employers with the ex-Service community (and better mapping armed forces skills and experience to the commercial world) - as evidenced in the US.

- Open source datasets exist that provide granular data on tens of thousands of roles including all those in the US military – this is rooted in the O*NET data framework curated by US Dept. of Labor.

- This data allows a skills and competency based profile to be easily built from an individuals' previous experience and matched to roles that demand these skills and competencies.

- The O*NET framework has been tried and tested in the UK, is recognised as best in class in other settings, and could provide the basis for a skills translation framework for the UK military.

8 Technology alone is not a silver bullet - but it is a cost-effective impact multiplier.

- The impact and therefore value of human intervention and support is clear both to employers and ex-service personnel – although it is also clear it is not scalable within the resource constraints.

- Cost effective technology solutions can not only prove additive to the existing face to face services but drive shared and collaborative efficiencies which enable funding to reach further.

- The ability to layer on tools and options to technology which augment human intervention is also key such as behavioural, learning style and emotional quotient profiling as a tool for employers and an aide to better self-understanding.

- Unanimously, employers and ex-Service personnel who responded to our survey accepted and embraced technology as an essential part of the recruitment process.

9 Future employment solutions need to be market led and with collaboration at their heart - designed with business processes, challenges and priorities in mind.

- From a demand perspective, employers are the customer. As such, ensuring their needs are met collaboratively is key to a future commercially sustainable solution.

- From a supply perspective, ex-Service personnel are consumers. Their decisions on service provision and access are founded on readily available evidence of impact.

- In a complicated stakeholder arena but with a shared aim and vision, collaboration is the critical factor in success.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Increase dialogue and practical collaboration between business, military charities and other stakeholders; to share insights, identify common requirements and feed into the ongoing development of solutions which respond to Recommendations 2 to 8.

Ongoing collaboration between all actors interested in supporting ex-Service personnel is essential to ensure joined up services that effectively guide them into fulfilling and rewarding roles. The creation of a practical working group with representation from military charities, government, ex-Service personnel and employers (both corporates and SMEs) with the goal of jointly developing the required action-oriented interventions, should support realisation of the recommendations of this report.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a framework for the mapping and translation of military qualifications, experiences and skills into their commercial equivalents.

This should be undertaken through collaboration with the MoD, other agencies (such as DfE and DWP), professional membership bodies (such as FSB and CITB) and employers, and facilitated by a labour market specialist organisation. This will enable employers to better understand the relevance and usefulness of this experience and help military charities and other intermediaries to better support ex-Service personnel with employability and career support. The translation framework should be open source and freely available for use by third parties.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop opportunity matching technology built on the framework developed in Recommendation 2. This technology will work to match ex-Service talent with employers through skills and competencies, not CVs. Owned by those who partner in its creation, it will serve as a sustainable asset and the basis for ongoing collaboration.

Supported by the MoD, OVA and military charity community and delivered by a labour market specialist organisation, the technology will enable employers of all sizes, including SMEs, to utilise the military skills translation framework and take advantage of this talent pool. Finally, it will further enable intermediaries (such as military charities) and their beneficiaries to connect more easily and effectively to the business community.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Generate and share relevant, detailed and actionable labour market data on the supply and demand of ex-Service skills and competencies through the technology approach in Recommendation 3.

The current UK labour market is more fragmented and developing faster than ever; the types of jobs available - and the skills needed to do them - are constantly evolving. High quality information from both sides of the market is necessary to ensure relevant and useful career guidance is provided to ex-Service personnel, as well as those in transition, by better understanding the skills employers need. This data also has the potential to inform strategy, investment and commissioning by public and charitable organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Provide a means for ERS committed employers to access, engage and hire ex-Service personnel - and build this into the accreditation, assurance and monitoring processes.

Many ERS committed employers expressed the desire to support and employ more ex-Service personnel but lacked the means of connecting with the armed forces community on any more than an ad-hoc basis. With a means of connecting with ex-Service personnel in their local community, supporting and employing members of the ex-Service community would be far easier, and could become part of accreditation for 'gold' status, for instance. It could also be a key driver for realising the growth aspirations of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and the Employer recognition Scheme (ERS).

RECOMMENDATION 7

Enable employers to more easily offer additional forms of employment support to the service and ex-Service communities - including work experience, internships and apprenticeships.

These programmes create opportunities for individuals to try new roles and explore industries and sectors, while reducing risk for both employers and developing knowledge and insight to inform their own decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Unlock the effective development of social capital for ex-Service personnel through networking, mentoring, advice, and support from the business community.

Providing employers and their staff a means of offering support, guidance, mentoring and networking (which this report signals an appetite for) can help to overcome the barrier of low social capital. This could be achieved either in an analogue form (by creating partnerships with major employers) or through a digital platform, which would enable more effective engagement particularly with SME employers.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Develop a compelling economic and quantitative business case of the commercial value organisations can derive by employing ex-Service personnel.

While anecdotally clear, there is not yet a compelling economic business case (both commercially and in responding to organisational CSR) demonstrating the advantages of hiring from the ex-Service community. This piece of work would be an essential building block in helping to change employer perceptions of the ex-Service community and drive the sustainability of employment services for ex-Service personnel.

Table of Contents

1

Introduction / Background

2

Analysis of Skills Matching Practice

3

Key Findings

1

Introduction/
Background

1.1   Project Background and Aims

The challenge of skills translation for ex-Service personnel - and their disproportionately limited access to SMEs – are frequently cited or referred to as issues by both ex-Service personnel and employers. However, there is insufficient research focused on understanding these specific factors better, the reasons behind them, and ideas for how these barriers could be overcome to build a better system for both parties. Enquiry into these factors, among ex-Service personnel, their spouses/partners and SMEs, forms the basis of this research report.

The aim of this project, therefore, is to evaluate skills transfer and employment access barriers between the ex-Service community and SMEs and explore systemic opportunities to overcome these barriers through innovation and collaboration.

To achieve this aim, the report has three distinct but connected objectives:

- To increase understanding of the current standards of skills translation for ex-Service personnel, and the challenges faced in effectively implementing them.

- To better understand the barriers faced by start-ups and SMEs in engaging with ex-Service personnel and their families, and vice versa.

- To explore recommendations as well as investigate practical solutions to help overcome these barriers.

1.2   Labour Market Context

The world of work is changing faster than ever before. The types of jobs available are evolving faster than many can keep up, as well as the skills needed to do them. According to the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs' report, 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately work in job roles that don't even exist yet.[1] These skills gaps are growing every year as technological change and automation reshapes the employment landscape. Estimates vary on the speed and impact of this change on the labour market, but the effects of changing skills needs are already being felt. According to the Open University Business Barometer study, 91% of UK organisations struggled to find workers with the right skills in the last 12 months, costing employers a total of £6.3 billion in a year.[2]

Alongside these longer-term changes, the UK is experiencing a time of unprecedented upheaval in the labour market for other reasons. The rise of flexible, part-time, remote and gig-economy

work has changed the nature and understanding of the 'career'; and while these trends have helped lead to the lowest unemployment rate in decades, in-work poverty has been rising even faster than the employment rate[3], demonstrating that the quality of job is as important as the job itself. Alongside this, an ageing population, increasing impacts of automation and the as-yet uncertain impact of Brexit combine to paint the picture of a UK labour market in a state of flux.

'Good work' is crucially important to post-service personnel leading stable, fulfilling and happy lives.

---

1   World Economic Forum 'Future of Jobs Report 2018' see http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2018.pdf

2   Open University 'Business Barometer 2018' see http://www.open.ac.uk/business/apprenticeships/blog/business-barometer

3   Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) 'UK Poverty 2018' see https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2018

Every year, around 15,000 service men and women leave the armed forces and make the transition into civilian life. They join the estimated 2.4 million UK Armed Forces Veterans in the UK according to figures published by the Ministry of Defence (MoD)[4], making up an estimated 5% of adult household residents.

For Service personnel and their families, the process of transition into civilian life involves significant adjustment, both personally and professionally – but perhaps none more so than the transition into civilian employment. Securing fulfilling, gainful and equitable employment is a crucial aspect of ensuring that service personnel not only transition effectively but continue to build successful and happy lives for themselves and their families. The MoD provides for services delivered to those in resettlement and transition through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). The effectiveness of these services is clear when measured by the rate of employment at 6 months post discharge which is currently 86%[5].

The connections between effective employment and positive health, education and social mobility outcomes are clear. Good work gives meaning, structure and purpose to our lives, and provides the income and support necessary to significantly improve an individuals' quality of life. The Marmot Review on inequalities in health in 2010 found employment, but specifically good work, as one of the primary drivers for healthy happy lives. It found that "*while getting people into work is of critical importance for reducing health inequalities,*" jobs need to be "*sustainable and offer a minimum level of quality, to include not only a decent living wage, but also opportunities for in-work development, the flexibility to enable people to balance work and family life, and protection from adverse working conditions that can damage health.*"[6] The employment of ex-Service personnel therefore remains one of the principle areas of focus for those looking to ensure ex-Service personnel and their families can build successful civilian lives.

Low unemployment rates and effective ex-Service support networks mean many find employment immediately after serving.

In today's labour market, the vast majority of working age economically active adults are able to find work. The UK's unemployment rate is currently at 3.8%[7], its lowest level in nearly 45 years, and has been largely unchanged in the last two years. This very high employment rate is largely echoed for ex-Service personnel in official statistics, with little difference between the employment and economically active levels for those who have served in the Armed Forces when compared with the general population.[8]

Many organisations exist to enable and support this process – most focus their support during transition, with some organisations offering additional support throughout an ex-Service person's life. The CTP is the MoD's mechanism of provision for resettlement and employment support services, providing support during in service transition and until two years post discharge. The MoD's Defence Relationship Management (DRM) team manages the commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) which currently counts over 4,770 companies across the UK as its signatories, and the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) which has over 3,400 committed employers.[9] Alongside this, a huge amount of effective employment support is provided by both national and regional charities such as RFEA The Forces Employment Charity, and the Officers' Association, as well as commercial

---

4   Ministry of Defence (2019) 'Annual Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans Residing in Great Britain 2017' see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774937/20190128_-_APS_2017_Statistical_Bulletin_-_OS.pdf

5   MoD (2020) see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/868768/20200226_-_Statistical_Bulletin_v3_-_O.pdf

6   UK Government 'Fair Society, Happy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010' see https://www.parliament.uk/documents/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report.pdf

7   ONS (2019) 'Unemployment' see https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment

8   Ministry of Defence (2019), op. cit.

9   Ministry of Defence 'Armed Forces Covenant' see https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/get-involved/who-has-signed-the-covenant/

organisations and employment support advisors dedicated to supporting ex-Service personnel.

However, of the talent pool of roughly one million ex-Service personnel of working age, at any one time, those who are in receipt of resettlement and transition support account for circa 45,000 - leaving around 955,000 ex-Service personnel who no longer qualify for transition support. While there does continue to be employment support available to this much larger group (often delivered by charities and social enterprises), it is in no way commensurate to the intervention available through CTP and is founded on the need of the individual. This potential talent pool requires new and different routes to engagement and service delivery. Employer market demand for this talent pool is considerable and responding to this rather than individual need is key to ensuring the working age ex-Service population are a pool of talent from which business can derive competitive advantage.

Unemployment, and especially underemployment, remain a significant challenge for ex-Service personnel no longer eligible for transition support.

Despite the support networks currently in place and the official figures implying near-full employment, a more complex picture emerges from other surveys by support organisations such as The Royal British Legion, as well as many reports and studies working to understand the barriers faced by ex-Service personnel in engaging with the labour market. According to The Royal British Legion's 'Deployment to Employment' household study, working age veterans are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as their civilian contemporaries, and are also far more likely than their civilian

counterparts to be excluded from the labour market altogether as economically inactive.[10]

An arguably greater challenge, however, is understanding the quality of roles and careers ex-Service personnel are securing, relative to their talent and ability – in short, the issue of 'underemployment'. Low unemployment rates can often hide an increase in more insecure, lower-paid or exploitative work. For instance, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that with the help of part-time, zero hours and gig economy work, in-work poverty has as much as doubled in the last ten years and is now rising faster than the UK employment rate.[11]

Underemployment in the UK is an increasing concern across the labour market, and not just for ex-Service personnel. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests the percentage of workers who want more hours, or workers who want better jobs, is nearly double the unemployment rate, at about 9.7%, or 3.3 million people.[12] This report therefore aims to investigate how this trend extends to the veteran community. While underemployment is difficult to easily quantify in skills terms (it is challenging to understand whether someone is in a job that represents an underutilisation of their skills and talents), one of the more effective ways of approaching an understanding is to look at employer's perception of, and engagement with, the ex-Service community.

In this context, multiple previous studies into the employment of ex-Service personnel and employer perceptions of ex-Service personnel demonstrate continued and systemic challenges. While individual conclusions and recommendations vary, two primary issues, and common themes, seem to emerge from much of these studies. **These are (1) a lack of understanding and appreciation of the transferable skills, competencies and experience from the military by employers, and (2) a difficulty**

10 Royal British Legion (2016) 'Deployment to Employment' see https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/deployment-to-employment.pdf?sfvrsn=d43b2d6c_2
11 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018), op. cit.
12 ONS 'Labour Market Economic Commentary' see https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomiccommentary/september2017

particularly among small and medium sized business (SMEs) in accessing the ex-Service talent pool.

These identified factors require greater investigation - and therefore form the focus of this research - but emerge in the majority of existing literature on the employment of ex-Service personnel in some form.

(1) Employers continue to struggle in understanding the relevant skills and experience of service leavers and ex-Service personnel.

Communicating the relevant skills, competencies and experience developed as part of a career in the armed forces is an essential part of securing the right job during transition and progressing one's career in the years following. One facet of this is understanding and excelling at commercial recruitment processes, which frequently involve CVs and cover letters, interview techniques and competency-based questioning. Another is being able to map the skills developed during a military career across to a civilian, commercial context to demonstrate the value of this experience. Across CTP, ex-Service employment support providers and other stakeholders there is support and guidance in place to try to help service leavers in this process.

Unfortunately, however, employers continue to highlight poor applications and CVs, and a lack of understanding of transferable skills, as a significant barrier to the employment of ex-Service personnel. Lord Ashcroft found that, *"employers reported a common set of problems that exist despite the considerable effort that goes into preparing Service Leavers for transition. These included... poor CVs that do not do justice to the Service Leaver"*[13]. Similarly, the Futures 4 Forces report found when interviewing employers that they frequently *"admitted to being confused by military jargon that sometimes litters Service leavers' CVs"*[14]. They also frequently found it *"difficult to match ex-military*

personnel's skill sets to their company's specific skill requirements". The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) 'A Force for Business: Service Leavers and Small Business' report echoes this. The FSB cite *"a lack of understanding of the transferability and equivalence of skills acquired in the military to the commercial civilian domain"* as a key challenge.[15]

Crucially, employer satisfaction research among those employers who have hired ex-Service personnel suggests that the skills and competencies themselves are not the issue at all. Indeed, research by Deloitte shows organisations who have employed ex-Service personnel are very positive about the value they bring. 72% of organisations employing ex-Service personnel would definitely recommend doing so to others (giving a score of 10/10), more than half of organisations said they tended to be promoted more quickly than their wider workforce, and their core skills demonstrated were found to be among the skills organisations were most in need of – including strategic management and managing and motivating staff.[16]

This research makes clear that the challenge is not the skills or competencies themselves (or a lack thereof) – quite the opposite; ex-Service personnel who were hired by organisations generally outperformed the average. Instead, the problem was in translating and presenting those skills and competencies during the recruitment phase before even getting the job.

(2) SME employers are struggling to find and employ the ex-Service community, either directly or through intermediaries.

Many effective employment support services exist to enable those in resettlement and transition, and ex-Service personnel and their families to connect with employment opportunities after

---

13 Lord Ashcroft 'The Veterans' Transition Review' see http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/vtrreport.pdf

14 Futures 4 Forces 'UK Employers Perceptions on the Employment and Employability of Ex-Service Personnel'
    see https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/20150731-F4F-Final.pdf

15 Federation of Small Businesses (2019) 'A Force for Business' see https://www.fsb.org.uk/
    campaign/a-force-for-business-service-leavers-and-small-business.html

16 Deloitte (2016) 'Veterans Work: Recognising the Potential of Ex-Service Personnel' see:
    http://185.123.99.29/~veteranswork/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/J10136_Veterans_work_brochure-web.pdf

leaving the Armed Forces – not just through CTP, but the charities and organisations that support in this process. Similarly, the AFC and ERS encourage employers to commit to supporting, engaging with and employing members of the service and ex-Service community.

However, many of the current models for employer engagement, while creating beneficial relationships and matching many of those in resettlement or transition with fulfilling work, mainly cater for large private sector employers or very proactive and engaged SMEs. These matching services are often analogue (reliant on human expertise) or first generation digital (online jobs boards) and therefore time and resource-intensive, with high transaction costs to achieve success for employers. While the primary beneficiary of CTP employer engagement are those in resettlement and transition, ex-Service personnel can also gain access to the opportunities generated by CTP's Employer Relationship Managers (ERMs) as a result of through-life charitable support from charities such as RFEA The Forces Employment Charity. Proportionately though there is only a low level of take up of such opportunities by the 1 million working age ex-Service population, with RFEA The Forces Employment Charity reporting having supported around 6,000 such ex-Service beneficiaries in the last 12 months. The CTP and it's ERMs engaged just over 9,000 employers generating around 83,000 opportunities last year. While an impressive achievement, this represents a fraction of the total addressable market of 5.8m businesses in the UK, and a potential talent pool of 1 million working age ex-Service personnel.

This resource and commercial cost can deter smaller or early stage employers, or those with fewer resources directly allocated to sourcing talent. Thus while some 87% of employers are aware of programmes that provide recruitment or transition services, only 24% have some affiliation to one.[17] The result is that both ex-Service personnel and SMEs miss out on

the opportunity to connect with each other – ex-Service personnel to access a far greater pool of opportunities and sectors, and employers on a talent pool they are unable to take advantage of. The FSBs 'Service Leavers and Small Business' report echoes this point. They argue small businesses are keen to employ ex-Service personnel, but that a series of obstacles exist. The FSB suggest *"low awareness among small employers of the availability of service leavers as a source of talent"* is a major factor, alongside *"costs in reaching potential employees with an Armed Forces background."* They further believe *"veterans face similar difficulties in searching for potential small business employment."*[18]

---

17 Deloitte (2016), op. cit.
18 Federation of Small Businesses (2019), op. cit.

2

Analysis of Skills Matching Practice

As mentioned, an initial literature review identified multiple previous research studies which highlighted the challenges faced by employers in understanding and appreciating skills gained during military service, and their relevance in the commercial world. It was one of the hypotheses of this report that this was the result of a lack of standardised skills matching capability. This research therefore included a desk-based analysis of what is currently being used in the UK labour market and comparing and contrasting with the US system.

2.1   UK Employment Services and Recruitment Market

In the UK there are presently three broad groups of actors delivering employability interventions for ex-Service communities, focusing on supporting people to find, secure or sustain work. While the drivers of these organisations vary, as do the challenges and barriers the services they deliver are designed to overcome, their broad business models and approaches can broadly be described as:

- **Not-Profit - Charity or social enterprise actors** using a mixture of funding derived from primarily charitable or public sector sources to support those with demonstrable barriers to work on a 'journey' of interventions to realise an outcome and deliver measurable social impact.

- **For-Profit - Private sector organisations** utilising public sector monies (usually as a result of publicly commissioned programs) to deliver contractual services to a prescribed cohort of individuals, with variant levels of barriers and hurdles to work, to realise a set of contractually obligated outcomes and generate a commercial return.

- **Commercial Recruiters** servicing employer demand for a specific skill set or type of talent for a commercial fee. Primarily for individuals who have proactively identified themselves as immediately work-ready. Included in this grouping are a number of purely online offerings such as LinkedIn, jobs boards, applications, and aggregator platforms ad infinitum.

These different groups vary in the processes, systems and levels of intervention used for profiling, translating and matching skills and competencies.

It is clear, however, that all of the identified groupings in some way rely on widely accepted market norms of 'person-job matching' delivered solutions, either 'in-house' (their own tool) or externally (a reliance on a recommended group or set of publicly available online tools or sites). These tools generally rely on technology which matches CVs or simple person-driven profiles with advertised roles, supported by employment support advisors:

- **Individual profiling tools** used to understand and overcome barriers to work and populated through both self and 'advisor' driven input. Often heavily reliant on the skill and experience of the advisor in understanding, translating and targeting (matching) the individual with a planned outcome as a result of a series of interventions. CVs are often both an input and potential output of such approaches.

- **Off-the shelf 'candidate/client management systems'** containing profiling tools pre-populated with referral information and background from the referring agency which recommend employment support interventions. As off the shelf systems these are aimed at all jobseekers and not tailored for ex-Service personnel or their skills/competencies. Activity is self-led and advisor guided - but is relatively light touch compared with the above. CVs are often a source of data for input.

- **Commercially standard 'recruitment' Customer Management Systems** which rely on a CV and a recruiter created profile at varying levels of detail which serve to match and guide the activity of the recruiter either in person or digitally.

In addition, there are a large number of solutions and tools in use which augment the above. These include career interest profiling and psychometrics, behavioural insight tools, and qualification translation frameworks[19]; there is little evidence however of these being used at scale. The vast majority of such tools are in essence CV builders and profiling tools which attempt to build a CV or CV content to aid individual applications. Notably there is a real body of evidence that recruitment processes which rely on CVs, application forms, and candidate self-declared skills are the least effective at identifying transferable skills for employers (as opposed to interviews, practical tasks, and presentations)[20]. A number of actors seek to use these different tools in a complementary manner, but with varying levels of success.

The most relevant and contextually specific framework for translating military qualifications was recently developed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) as a result of a research study[21] prompted by the work of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner. While helpful in mapping service derived qualifications to their civilian equivalents in a widely accepted and understood framework, it is limited in its ability to enable the ex-Service person to understand or communicate the skills these qualifications mean they have developed which are the real demand (rather than the qualification itself) of employers. It is noted that further work is ongoing supported by Scottish Government, but this will clearly only impact a relatively small proportion of the UK's ex-Service community.

Similarly, there are no standardised or widely understood means of translating skills and competencies through a set framework in the UK ex-Service employment space. As above, different companies, organisations and bodies generally approach this either with off-the-shelf solutions, or their own approach informed largely by the knowledge of individual advisors.

This assessment is of course a generalisation as it seeks to provide an overview of the entire UK market's approach to skills translation. It also doesn't aim to decry the effectiveness of many individual services which are currently being offered. This analysis merely serves to emphasise that a standardised skills translation framework (which currently does not exist) would enable more effective, and more scalable, provision. It further serves to emphasise that the enablement of such a skills translation framework is reliant on an integrated technological platform that provides for universal access and ease and consistency of use. Driving standardised utilisation of such a framework across a cohort size of 1 million is not achievable without collaboration, technological enablement and the type of networked communication posited by the SCQF.

2.2   US Approach and Tools

This UK context can be compared and contrasted with the US approaches to matching ex-Service personnel with opportunities - which are generally organised and enabled using the O*NET data framework[22]. There are of course differences between the US approach to veteran support

and that of the UK, and the climates they operate within – namely that the US approach is one of aiming to create positive inequity for veterans; operating within a climate more engaged with the military community drives a different level of proactivity from labour market

---

19 SCQF see 'Join Forces with SCQF' https://scqf.org.uk/media/1661/scq-109-armed-forces-brochure-web.pdf

20 Nesta (2019) 'Transferable Skills in the Workplace: Key Findings from a Survey of UK Employers' see: https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/education-learning/schools/Documents/transferable-skills-in-the-workplace.pdf

21 SCQF (2019) 'Veterans Skills Recognition Project' see https://scqf.org.uk/media/1663/veterans-scoping-paper-final-report-march-2019.pdf

22 O*NET Online see https://www.onetonline.org/

actors including those in the private sector. Nonetheless, the US system of understanding and connecting skills and competencies is of significant relevance to the UK market as many of these roles, skills and competencies are similar.

The O*NET framework is the most systematic and extensive source for information about civilian occupations in the United States. It was developed by the US Department of Labor for collecting and disseminating information on occupational and worker requirements and to support the creation of industry competency models. The central component of O*NET is a database, which contains information on hundreds of occupations. Starting in 1998, O*NET has collected information about both workers' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) in their respective occupations and the job

characteristics or job dimensions associated with performing those occupations[23].

The O*NET Data Collection Programme began in June 2001 and has been in continuous operation since then. O*NET data is gathered by surveying a broad range of workers from each occupation (response rates shown at Figure 1). Because the US labour market is ever-changing, the data is continually updated. As occupations evolve, new occupations are created, or old occupations become obsolete, current information about each occupation is incorporated into the O*NET database. Approximately 100 occupations are updated each year via the O*NET Data Collection Program and recent updates of O*NET includes identification of and information about 'green' careers and new emerging occupations such as Cyber Security. Management of the O*NET system had a budget of $6 million US dollars in 2012.

FIG 1. ESTABLISHMENT METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION RESULTS[24]

Sampled establishments	203,266
Eligible establishments	163,834
Participating establishments	124,598
Establishment response rate (eligible establishments/participating establishments)	76.1%
Eligible employees	248,507
Participating employees	161,505
Employee response rate (eligible employees/participating employees)	65.0%

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, www.doleta.gov

The O*NET programme uses a data structure, the O*NET Content Model (see Figure 2), to organise occupational information and to provide a common language of standardised and defined occupation descriptors and measures for use by all audiences. The O*NET Content Model is the result of extensive research. It comprises worker-oriented and job-oriented characteristics at both an occupation-specific level and across occupations.

23 Mariani (1999) 'Replace with a Database' see https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/1999/Spring/art01.pdf
24 O*NET Centre see https://www.onetcenter.org/dl_files/omb2011/Supporting_StatementA.pdf

FIG 2.O*NET CONTENT MODEL[25]

Worker Characteristics

- Abilities
- Occupational Interests
- Work Values
- Work Styles

Worker requirements

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Education

Experience requirements

- Experience and training
- Skills - Entry Requirement Licensing

Worker-oriented

Cross Occupation

O*net OnLine

Occupation Specific

Job-oriented

Occupational Characteristics

- Work Activities
- General - Intermediate - Detailed
- Organizational Context
- Work Context

Workforce requirements

- Labor Market Information
- Occupational Outlook

Occupation-specific information

- Title - Description
- Alternate Titles
- Tasks
- Technology Skills & Tools

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, www.doleta.gov

25 O*NET Centre see https://www.onetcenter.org/content.html

The O*NET Content Model describes occupations in terms of the skills and knowledge required, how the work is performed, and typical work settings. In the US, it is used by businesses, educators, job seekers, human resources professionals, and the publicly funded Workforce Investment System to help meet the talent needs of an increasingly competitive global economy. For each job, O*NET provides the following information:

- Worker Characteristics - Enduring characteristics that may influence both performance and the capacity to acquire knowledge and skills required for effective work performance.

- Worker Requirements - Descriptors referring to work-related attributes acquired and/or developed through experience and education.

- Experience Requirements - Requirements related to previous work activities and explicitly linked to certain types of work activities.

- Occupational Requirements - A comprehensive set of variables or detailed elements that describe what various occupations require.

- Workforce Characteristics - Variables that define and describe the general characteristics of occupations that may influence occupational requirements.

- Occupation-Specific Information - Variables or other Content Model elements of selected or specific occupations.

2.3   O*NET as a Skills Taxonomy

As has been identified, in order to classify data sets and attributes of roles and individuals with consistency, O*NET uses a detailed taxonomy. This taxonomy is the critical enabler in utilising such a large and complete data set to be able to profile and match with accuracy. The power required to achieve such accuracy demands the type of computation only available through the use of technology. There is however a great deal of this taxonomy that allows for entry point explorations such as around an individuals skills and their sources. Within its taxonomy, O*NET classifies 34 'top-level' skills in into six skill groups[26]. Given the desire to standardise the research approach and exploration, coupled with the evidential acceptance of O*NET as best in class, these top-level skills were selected as the skills taxonomy basis for our primary research. They are:

- **Basic Skills** - Developed capacities that facilitate learning or the more rapid acquisition of knowledge:

  - Active Listening - Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.

  - Critical Thinking - Using logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems.

  - Learning Strategies - Selecting and using training/instructional methods and procedures appropriate for the situation when learning or teaching new things.

  - Mathematics - Using mathematics to solve problems.

---

26 O*NET Online see https://www.onetonline.org/skills/

- Monitoring - Monitoring/Assessing performance of yourself, other individuals, or organisations to make improvements or take corrective action.

- Reading Comprehension - Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

- Science - Using scientific rules and methods to solve problems.

- Speaking - Talking to others to convey information effectively.

- Writing - Communicating effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.

- **Complex Problem Solving Skills** - Developed capacities used to solve novel, ill-defined problems in complex, real-world settings:

  - Complex Problem Solving - Identifying complex problems and reviewing related information to develop and evaluate options and implement solutions.

- **Resource Management Skills** - Developed capacities used to allocate resources efficiently:

  - Management of Financial Resources - Determining how money will be spent to get the work done, and accounting for these expenditures.

  - Management of Material Resources - Obtaining and seeing to the appropriate use of equipment, facilities, and materials needed to do certain work.

  - Management of Personnel Resources - Motivating, developing, and directing people as they work, identifying the best people for the job.

- Time Management - Managing one's own time and the time of others.

- **Social Skills** - Developed capacities used to work with people to achieve goals:

  - Coordination - Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.

  - Instructing - Teaching others how to do something.

  - Negotiation - Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.

  - Persuasion - Persuading others to change their minds or behaviour.

  - Service Orientation - Actively looking for ways to help people.

  - Social Perceptiveness - Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.

- **Systems Skills** - Developed capacities used to understand, monitor, and improve socio-technical systems:

  - Judgment and Decision Making - Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one.

  - Systems Analysis - Determining how a system should work and how changes in conditions, operations, and the environment will affect outcomes.

  - Systems Evaluation - Identifying measures or indicators of system performance and the actions needed to improve or correct performance, relative to the goals of the system.

- **Technical Skills** - Developed capacities used to design, set-up, operate, and correct malfunctions involving application of machines or technological systems:

  - Equipment Maintenance - Performing routine maintenance on equipment and determining when and what kind of maintenance is needed.

  - Equipment Selection - Determining the kind of tools and equipment needed to do a job.

  - Installation - Installing equipment, machines, wiring, or programs to meet specifications.

  - Operation and Control - Controlling operations of equipment or systems.

  - Operation Monitoring - Watching gauges, dials, or other indicators to make sure a machine is working properly.

- Operations Analysis - Analysing needs and product requirements to create a design.

- Programming - Writing computer programs for various purposes.

- Quality Control Analysis - Conducting tests and inspections of products, services, or processes to evaluate quality or performance.

- Repairing - Repairing machines or systems using the needed tools.

- Technology Design - Generating or adapting equipment and technology to serve user needs.

- Troubleshooting - Determining causes of operating errors and deciding what to do about it.

2.4   US Military Skills Translation – Applicability and use of O*NET

In the US military, Military Occupational Classifications (MOCs) are used to identify specific jobs. Each military role is defined by a code that reflects their branch of the services and their career path. The US Army and US Marines use Military Occupational Specialty Codes (MOS), the US Air Force uses Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC), and the US Navy uses Navy Enlisted Classification codes (NEC)[27].

O*NET is at the heart of various nationwide and state-wide efforts to support effective ex-Service employment transition in the US. Central to the efficacy of these efforts is the regular mapping of service careers via the MOC - against the wider O*NET framework.

The MOC crosswalk is regularly updated by the Department of Defense and incorporated into O*NET Online[28] and My Next Move for Veterans[29].

Over 11,000 MOC occupations are now linked to related O*NET occupations. The crosswalk is supplemented with credentialing (the process of establishing the qualifications and assessing their background and legitimacy) data from each of the single services, such as Army Credentialing Opportunities On Line (COOL)[30]. Transitioning military personnel can use their MOC or title to discover related civilian occupations/careers within the O*NET Online Military Crosswalk Search[31] or My Next Move for Veterans' Military Transition Search[32].

---

27 Uniformed Service University see https://deploymentpsych.org/occupational-code
28 O*NET Online, op. cit.
29 My Next Move for Veterans see https://www.mynextmove.org/vets/
30 Army COOL see https://www.cool.osd.mil/army/index.htm
31 O*NET Online see https://www.onetonline.org/crosswalk/MOC/
32 My Next Move for Veterans see https://www.mynextmove.org/vets/find/military

2.5   Third Party Examples of O*NET Military Skills Translation

The O*NET databases including the content model, occupation library, KSA data and associated crosswalks have been classified as open data and therefore are freely available for use by third parties. Third party developers can access the military searches from O*NET Web Services, or they can access the source files from the supplemental files section of the O*NET Resource Center. Given the significant investment and the sophistication of the O*NET framework, it has emerged as a recognised standard for labour market data, and military skills translation, and powers skills matching and credentialing activities both in the US and around the world. Various examples of third-party integration of military skills translation can be found embedded in technology solutions:

- Google Jobs[33] - As of 2018, transitioning and ex-Service personnel in the US can now enter their MOC code into Google's main search or their career site job search bar and - using an O*NET skills translation framework - be automatically matched to relevant roles based on knowledge, skills and abilities. Google's Veteran program is widely understood and well marketed as a result of a credible and coherent offering[34]

- Various employers also use the O*NET framework to offer a military skills translation experience similar to Google's on their own jobs site. These include FedEx, Siemens, Encompass Health and Lockheed Martin.

- Job boards - O*NET also powers a number of ex-Service focussed job sites such as Getting Hired[35] and CareerBuilder[36] so that a job search starting with a current or previous MOC code automatically presents job matches based on the O*NET generated skills profile.

2.6   Conclusion

The research in this section aimed to understand the skills translation methods and frameworks used in UK ex-Service employment support as a means of better understanding the challenges faced by ex-Service personnel in understanding and articulating their skills and competencies, employers in understanding them, and employment support intermediaries in assisting in this process. It is clear that while there is effective provision and employment support advice being given, there is currently no common standard or shared understanding of the transferable skills and competencies from which individuals or employers can draw. It is also evident that, while admittedly in a setting with additional benefits in terms of employer engagement and

veteran reputation, that the O*NET model and its veteran crosswalk used in US employment models represents a possible example of how this could be achieved in the UK. It also identifies the key and critical role of technology and unified platforms to utilise such data and frameworks as the engine of scale and therefore impact.

---

33 Google Jobs see https://careers.google.com/jobs/
34 Google Veteran Program see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z82rNz1XBJQ
35 Getting Hired see https://www.gettinghired.com/
36 Career Builder see https://www.careerbuilder.com/

3

Key Findings

This chapter summarises key findings from the primary research undertaken in the Solent. Separate surveys and interviews were undertaken with both sides of the market - working with SMEs, ex-Service personnel and their spouses/partners - to better understand the challenges facing the military community and employers, as well as opportunities for collaboration around shared solutions. The key findings from each of these groups are outlined in turn. Within each section, specific key findings are arranged thematically according to the different areas of focus – including current employment trends, skills translation challenges, support networks, and opportunities for future solutions. The full findings and analysis, along with the methodology for this process, can be found in chapters 5 and 6.

3.1   SMEs

3.1.1   ARMED FORCES COVENANT & EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

KEY FINDING 1

Of those committed to the ERS there is a significant gap between their expectations or aspirations of hiring from the ex-Service community and what they had realised as a result of their commitment. Only half of ERS employers identified it as a proven route to accessing ex-Service talent pools.

3.1.2   CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

KEY FINDING 2

The recruitment tools currently being used (networking sites, recruitment sites and aggregators, jobs boards and internal recruitment portals) are generally standardised across the labour market, rather than specific for ex-Service personnel. This current recruitment paradigm is therefore challenging for any individual or group of individuals whose skills or experience are outside the norm and thereby potentially misunderstood - their risk and value is entirely open to the bias of perception.

3.1.3   EMPLOYING EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL

KEY FINDING 3

The external media created perception of ex-Service personnel was recognised by SME respondents. Broadly, respondents were able to identify and disregard some of the more 'extreme' perceptions that came across - including the widely purported view of ex-Service personnel

being 'mad, bad and sad' and of them having the potential to be violent. Evidently, however, while these more extreme preconceptions were disregarded, biases clearly remained among the group - often subconsciously.

KEY FINDING 4

While there was a clear appetite to engage and hire ex-Service talent, there appears to be very limited organisational disclosure of veteran status of their current employees. Identifying and celebrating the ex-Service talent that is inherent within these organisations may prove a successful route to attracting and engaging more of it. It may also prove a beneficial route to identifying mentors (both formal and informal) who could act as points of advice and guidance for new and prospective ex-Service employees.

KEY FINDING 5

There were consistent and regular comments on the lack of commercial or tailored language in the CVs and poorly worded application forms received from ex-Service personnel.

- 36% of respondents identified that the CVs and application forms of ex-Service personnel were difficult to understand and identify their transferable skills gained from the military.

Counter to this point though, there was a widely reported experience that ex-Service personnel are much better at selling themselves, their experience and skills, face to face and at interview. These two points appear counter to each other, but would

suggest that written 'traditional' approaches such as the CVs and applications of ex-Service personnel under-sell their skills and experiences, an impression only overcome if the candidate manages to make it past this stage to interview.

3.1.4   SKILLS

KEY FINDING 6

The top 10 general purpose skills organisations identified as most in demand and important to them aligned well with those ex-Service personnel identified they had gained in service. The top 6 for SMEs:

- Active Listening

- Time Management

- Critical Thinking

- Speaking

- Judgement & Decision Making

- Complex Problem Solving

These correlated almost exactly with those of ex-Service personnel who identified the same top 6 but in a differing order, clearly identifying a clear overlap in supply and demand.

KEY FINDING 7

An important observation when triangulated with wider employer experiences is that

the current recruitment paradigm (HR processes and systems and CV reliant) seeks to mitigate employer risk rather than identify candidate value.

Critically this is a challenge that requires systemic change to overcome - a new recruitment paradigm. CVs purposefully communicate candidate value, whereas the recruitment decision maker is seeking to mitigate their risk – this mismatch is amplified for those who are seemingly more risky our outside of the norm.

3.1.5   FUTURE SOLUTIONS

KEY FINDING 8

There was a real recognition by the respondents of the talent pool that exists, but a generalised frustration at their inability to access it. There was clearly and with consistency a real appetite to find new ways of accessing and understanding the talent pool and its inherent skills and abilities.

60%

of respondents identified their organisation would benefit from a solution that made it easier to identify and understand the transferable skills of ex-Service personnel.

- 69% of all respondents (79% of ERS committed respondents) reported their organisation would be interested in exploring the benefits of a future model that provided access to and engagement of ex-Service talent.

KEY FINDING 9

There was clear enthusiasm from employers to offer 'exposure' opportunities (such as work experience or internships) that mutually benefit both parties. SMEs stated their preference to recruit 'known entities' or look beyond traditional public methods for their recruitment - which work experience opportunities can achieve. These approaches also provide an opportunity to realise competitive advantage for ex-Service personnel through managed network and social capital development alongside meaningful and material employability interventions.

Respondents reported that their organisations had an appetite to offer employment related opportunities with 55% offering the potential of work experience, 33% apprenticeships, 33% mentoring, 29% knowledge and skills sharing, and 28% wider employability support.

KEY FINDING 10

The transferability, equivalence and understanding of qualifications was identified as an important area. There are a number of readily identifiable publicly available frameworks[37] to define or achieve equivalence at relatively low or no cost. It seems embedding these into a future solution would aid engagement and understanding. Importantly though, the ability to describe what these qualifications mean in practice, and the skills and experience developed as a result, is more important than simply stating the qualification itself.

KEY FINDING 11

Working with organisations to develop an understanding and focus on the true commercial value of working with the ex-Service community is an important factor. Presently the focus appears to be on the achievement of philanthropic goals (CSR) and not the HR and commercial benefits of engaging with this talent pool. Helping employers understand the commercial business case for growing a reliance on ex-Service talent would have huge benefits.

3.2   Ex-Service Personnel

3.2.1   EMPLOYMENT

KEY FINDING 1

Between a third and a half of ex-Service personnel reported they were in some way underemployed in comparison to their aspiration.

- 31% of respondents said their civilian employment did not fully meet their aspirations.

- 47% of respondents felt their civilian employment did not offer comparable opportunities for promotion and development as they had experienced in service.

- 49% of respondents felt they did not receive comparable pay and seniority to that which they experienced in service.

- More than 22% of respondents felt their transferable military skills were not being fully utilised in their civilian employment.

---

37   UK Government see https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

KEY FINDING 2

Learning from those with more experience and those who have gone/done before is reflective of how knowledge is built in service. Aligning this with the trust inherent in individuals with whom there is a lived experience connection (of service) and therefore trust, both in a formal and informal setting, was widely suggested as the best route to managing expectations and developing knowledge. This was especially true when focused on specific industries, roles, and employers. This research therefore clearly suggests ex-Service peer-to-peer support, mentoring and guidance play a key role in effective employability solutions.

3.2.2   TRANSITION

The focus of this report is the more than 900,000 working age ex-Service population who have left service more than 4 years ago. As a result, almost 76% of respondents had left the forces more than 4 years ago. As transition is an important part of entering the UK labour market for ex-Service personnel, this research looked at experiences of transition among this group. However, it should be noted that these findings and experiences are not necessarily reflective of the current transition process and services provided through the CTP, as a result of the majority of this cohort transitioning 4+ years ago.

KEY FINDING 3

During transition, the role of direct employment exposure through work experience and training were identified as critical factors in successful outcomes. Furthermore, direct exposure to employers themselves through employer engagement and networks was identified as crucial to building understanding of the labour market as well as social capital.

KEY FINDING 4

In terms of managing expectations toward the realisation of aspiration, it was reported that the advice and guidance available both 'inside the wire' and during transition often focused on sectors and opportunities traditionally associated with ex-Service careers and 'well-trodden paths' - rather than a true breadth of opportunities. It was further asserted this was sometimes a result of a limited exposure to certain areas of the labour market by those providing the information and guidance. It was recognised that these limitations did not exist by design - but also that it reflected an opportunity to augment this advice through a network of those with wider lived experience and knowledge.

KEY FINDING 5

Respondents identified that there is a translation problem on both sides of the labour market. Not necessarily just qualifications and skills, but 'equivalency' of experience. This was reported as being at every stage and as being 'not seen' in service. This is despite the fact that many respondents reported that their resettlement interventions *"were about civilianising a CV"*, when in hindsight what they needed, was to be able to better understand their experience and skills and translate them into a civilian and commercial context.

3.2.3   FINDING AND SECURING WORK

KEY FINDING 6

Social capital and social networks were identified as the most critical success factor in finding and securing work which realised aspirations.

They were reported as routes to speed up learning and achieve an aspirational outcome more quickly. Those with more developed non-military social networks and social capital were significantly more likely to be in work which they identified as meeting their aspirations and having achieved such an outcome more quickly than those without.

KEY FINDING 7

Reflecting on the amount of time taken to build up social capital and knowledge about the commercial labour market was a common thread. When reflecting solutions to this, respondents discussed the need not necessarily for a 'one-stop shop' in support terms, but an effective co-ordinator and navigator. One that could signpost to the different forms of employment-related support available and make it easy to connect and engage with them.

3.2.4   SKILLS

KEY FINDING 8

The top ten general purpose skills identified as being gained or improved as a result of service corresponded heavily with those demanded by SMEs. The top 6:

- Time Management

- Critical Thinking

- Judgement and Decision Making

- Complex Problem Solving

- Active Listening

- Speaking

These correlated almost exactly with those of SMEs who identified the same top 6 but in a differing order. Critically it was universally reported that these skills were not explicitly communicated or evidenced in CVs or applications but assumed (by ex-Service personnel) as inherent and therefore part of the perception held by the recipient of such documents received from a readily identifiable ex-Service person. Not only does this identify a mis held belief about perceptions, but critically a lack of understanding of their own value; their skills and how they were obtained as a result of experience.

KEY FINDING 9

Understanding the skills, behaviours and competencies developed as a result of service, building evidenced examples of this from service experience, and then matching and tailoring this to the requirements of a commercial employer, is no mean feat. The absence of a coherent and consistent solution to this challenge (alongside tools and services to enable this) identifies a critical gap in provision and one which needs to be addressed systemically if impact and improvement is to be made.

3.3   Spouses/Partners of Ex-Service Personnel

3.3.1   DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

KEY FINDING 1

Continued self-identification of a specific 'status' (service spouse/partner or even ex-Service spouse/partner) appears limited once the individuals' spouse/partner has left service.

KEY FINDING 2

Disconnecting the challenges being a military spouse or partner poses from the wider 'life' challenges faced by all families is remarkably difficult. It was identified that, for most, the period of military service aligned heavily with the start of relationships, marriage, and ultimately children and the development of family. No longer being in a position of experiencing these situational challenges means the social disadvantage of spouses/partners of ex-Service personnel is broadly equitable with civilian spouses and partners more generally. As such, employment service solutions focused on overcoming the social disadvantage of similar groups would appear to be successful with this cohort.

3.3.2   FINDING AND SECURING WORK

KEY FINDING 3

The support identified as most valuable both in transition and on leaving the services for the serving individual and their spouse/partner was the network they had built of individuals who had 'gone before them'. They relied heavily on the advice, guidance and support of those with 'lived experience'. Social networks and therefore social capital were identified as critically important in enabling a successful transition and civilian life after service. They were also identified as critical to spouses/partners when moving as a result of posting. and seeking to find and secure new work. Building, curating and utilising these networks from place to place and setting to setting is important to overcoming disadvantage and driving equity and advantage.

3.3.3   SKILLS

KEY FINDING 4

More than two thirds of respondents believed they had gained valuable skills they might not otherwise have obtained as a result of their experiences as a service spouse/partner.

The top 3 reported skills gained as a result of their experience:

- Critical Thinking

- Active Listening

- Time Management

These correlated almost exactly with those of SMEs who identified the same top 3 but in a differing order. This is critically important in differentiating them from the remainder of the labour force and an advantage they should capitalise on. Being able to evidence these skills through experiences understood by employers would be valuable for the spouses/partners of ex-Service personnel during the recruitment process.

4

Conclusions & Recommendations

4.1   Conclusions

This report represents both a build and development of existing academic research into the employment of ex-Service personnel, alongside a focus on topic areas and specific groups (such as SMEs) which have not yet been explored in detail. The findings of this report are supported by, and supportive of, other research with a similar area of exploration, notably the work of Deloitte with 'Veterans Work'[38] and the series of research reports of the same name[39] [40]. Importantly the work of Deloitte and others appears to identify a clear similarity in the experiences, attitudes and aspirations of employers regardless of their size. Alongside these similarities however, the report aimed to explore some specific areas which were not previously developed in significant detail. This included among other areas an SME-specific focus (given their proportional lack of engagement with ex-Service personnel or the support networks and intermediaries around them), the current state and approach to military-commercial 'skills translation' and its importance in effective recruitment, as well as an exploration into the importance of social capital.

Acute skill shortages, wider labour market challenges and increasing interest in employing ex-Service personnel together reflect a real opportunity for the ex-Service community.

The results of the consultation clearly demonstrate that hiring and retaining reliable and skilled staff is now taken to be a business-critical issue for the vast majority of employers. The identification of skills shortages both at an industry-wide and organisational level demonstrate this, and echo wider trends across the UK labour market, meaning employers are experiencing increased competition for talented staff. What was further evident however, was a clear desire by the vast majority of employers (both ERS committed employers and those not already involved with the service and ex-Service communities) to engage, support and employ more ex-Service personnel. Taken together, these two interrelated trends represent a sizeable opportunity - for ex-Service personnel, their spouses, and the institutions and organisations that exist to support them - to use this increased interest and momentum to improve access to a greater quality and quantity of job opportunities.

Strong performance in commercial roles, and a set of skills which closely match those demanded by employers, clearly demonstrate the value of armed forces experience.

This growing employer interest in the skills and experience of the ex-Service community seems to be well founded. When employers were asked what general skills they felt they needed most, the answers received mapped overwhelmingly well to the general skills ex-Service personnel themselves felt they had developed during their time in service. Skills such as active listening, time management, critical thinking and judgement and decision making all featured at the top of both lists. In a labour market increasingly pivoting from hard skills to soft skills as crucial across a multitude of sectors, these transferable skills are clearly of significant and continued value for employers.

This is borne out by employer impressions of their employees who had served in the armed forces. Indeed, the vast majority of employer respondents who had employed ex-Service

38 Veterans Work see https://www.veteranswork.org.uk/

39 Deloitte (2018) 'Veterans Work: Moving On' see http://185.123.99.29/~veteranswork/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Veterans-Work-Moving-On-Report.pdf

40 Deloitte (2016), op. cit.

personnel attested that they made exceptional employees - and this experience was a significant part of the reason for an increased interest in engaging with the ex-Service community.

This is not to say that negative impressions of ex-Service men and women do not exist. SME employers identified perceptions of ex-Service personnel that they either held or believed their industry to hold - including an authoritative, directive and inflexible mentality, as well as the potential lack of independent thought. But overwhelmingly, the skills ex-Service personnel feel they possess as a result of armed forces experience, and the skills employers feel they need, match very closely.

Despite this, employers (and SME employers in particular) are failing to engage the ex-Service community at scale.

Whether directly, through services provided to those in transition, or through commitment to the AFC/ERS, employers repeatedly reported they struggle to find, engage with, understand the skills of, and employ the ex-Service community. SME employers argued that since they do not have the resources or processes to dedicate time to reaching out, or actively manage a relationship with an intermediary such as a military charity, it was challenging to connect with the ex-Service community.

The AFC/ERS represents one opportunity to overcome this barrier. Significant interest in participating from businesses once the scheme is explained shows there is a clear opportunity here, but the lack of understanding of the requirements and commercial benefits of the AFC/ERS among most employers we talked to shows the service needs to be communicated more effectively in order to take advantage of this opportunity. In addition, there continues

to be a clear gap between ERS committed employers' aspiration to hire, and the ERS representing a proven route to accessing ex-Service talent pools even once employers make such a commitment. The opportunity to capitalise on employer interest and engagement by connecting them to ex-Service talent is not yet being sufficiently taken advantage of.

Ex-Service personnel are failing to communicate their skills effectively in the current CV-driven recruitment system - and employers are failing to appreciate them as a result.

Given the findings of this report and others - that ex-Service personnel hold highly in-demand skills and demonstrate strong performance once in commercial roles, it would be imagined that those with armed forces experience perform well in the recruitment process as a result. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Tallying with previous reports in this space, employers repeatedly fed back that CVs and applications were often difficult to understand, and that the skills and competencies gained during service were difficult to identify and apply to their own needs. Interestingly, the majority of ex-Service personnel did feel confident they were able to translate their skills and competencies effectively - but employer responses suggests this belief is not entirely accurate. The situation is made worse as this CV-driven system underpins not only many of the current recruitment processes in the UK (such as recruitment sites, aggregators and employer recruitment portals) but also drives much of the support offered by ex-Service support intermediaries.

Effective military-commercial 'skills translation' is a significant gap in current service provision.

Why is it that this process of 'skills translation' is such a challenge, despite the extensive, and often helpful, support offered by the military charity community and others? One significant reason is the lack of any coherence in support around skills translation for the UK armed forces. There is currently no common framework that helps to map military roles, skills and competencies to commercial equivalents. (This is notably different to the US system, which is expanded upon below). It is therefore often left to individual employment support advisors (on behalf of military support charities and brokerages) or even the ex-Service person themselves, to translate this, with the variance this inevitably brings. This lack of shared understanding of military experience as it pertains to the commercial world, and the lack of coordination between support actors, results in a business community understandably struggling to see the true value of time spent in service.

However, generating first-hand experiences of the world of work for ex-Service personnel and those in transition, alongside exposing employers to the real life and in-person talents of the same, are critical to enabling better and more fulfilling careers post-transition. The positive impact of such interventions and opportunities when done effectively is supported by this research and that of other such studies. In particular, its effects on helping to overcome some of the systemic recruitment biases and issues discussed in this research is significant. Therefore, given its importance and potential for success, developing and scaling solutions that build social capital for transitioning personnel and the ex-Service community more widely (whether mentoring, employer networking, work experience, internships or coaching) should be a priority.

Networking, social capital and other forms of experiential support are hugely effective in supporting ex-Service personnel into good work.

Social capital is the currency of success. The importance of networking, contacts and other forms of informal support and guidance were repeatedly articulated by both those who had recently transitioned, as well as ex-Service personnel with experience in the commercial world. However, this awareness was largely developed through experience in the labour market - the importance of contacts and social capital was widely reported as being under-sold, under-valued, misunderstood and under-utilised during transition, and was particularly the case for more junior service personnel. This is to a certain extent understandable - service life by its very nature has the potential to prevent the development of levels of social capital for a variety of situational reasons; none more so than the distance from the commercial labour market for long periods of time.

The importance of lived service experience, and therefore of peer-to-peer support from ex-Service personnel, is crucial.

The positive impact for an individual of connecting with former service personnel with similar backgrounds, experiences or career arcs often proved to be one of the most impactful forms of support during this research. This appeared of such importance to ex-Service personnel partly as a function of the paradigm of military pedagogy - that learning from those with lived experience forms the basis of how those in the military develop knowledge. This is doubly important when the opportunity to learn from someone with a similar background is coupled with the inherent trust developed through the shared lived experience of service. Learning from a fellow ex-Service person (shared lived experience of service) about their own lived experience of the world of work has the potential of developing actionable knowledge with more efficacy than any other route.

Prototypes do exist for better connecting employers with the ex-Service community (and better mapping armed forces skills and experience to the commercial world) - as evidenced in the US.

The scale of both the opportunity and challenge that exists in supporting the ex-Service population in the US has provided a launchpad for the rapid development of models and approaches by actors with a real understanding of data and the application of technology in this space. Much of this employment innovation has been built on a shared military skills framework based in O*NET - the US Dept. of Labour's skills taxonomy - which has been accepted as global best in class by the DWP, DfE and a number of commercial actors such as Google. This framework offers a means of identifying and mapping military (and civilian) skills to commercial ones, representing a 'common language' for employers, veteran intermediaries and ex-Service personnel and enabling better matching between talent and opportunity. This framework further opens the door to matching employment support - including sources of advice and guidance, training, learning, knowledge, insight, networks and social capital.

Technology alone is not a silver bullet - but it is a cost-effective impact multiplier.

The lack of a holistic and consistent approach to profiling, case management and matching, the notable reliance on skilled and experienced human intervention, and the inconsistent application of outdated technology and platforms, describe what is at the core of one of the key 'market' challenges. Scaling human intervention is costly, navigating the various tools and systems being used is complicated,

relying on intuition and anecdotal evidence is risky; in combination they are at the heart of failure of many employment service interventions across the whole spectrum. There is of course a difficult balance to be achieved between the use of technology, data and 'science', and the importance of human intervention which is developmental and empathetic. The effective combination of these two types of intervention (in-person expert support, and digitally enabled profiling, management and matching services) arguably represent the most effective and efficient means of delivering support.

Future employment solutions need to be market led and with collaboration at their heart - designed with business processes, challenges and priorities in mind.

In order to ensure that any future solution is market led (from a demand perspective) it needs to reflect the feedback and input of employers both as a result of this research, but also in the design and implementation process, and importantly in the ongoing future evolution and evaluation of any such solution. This is equally true of a wider group of stakeholders in ensuring customer and consumer focus; ex-Service personnel themselves (supply), military charities and service providers as key supply partners, the MoD, wider military charity sector and others as key partners in funding and realising benefits. There is clearly a balance to be achieved in the design of any solution that serves two markets; one as a customer (demand) and one as a consumer (supply), doubly so when the consumer may be represented or supported by a partner organisation and includes intermediate services.

4.2   Recommendations

The recommendations of this research respond to the key insights and conclusions above, as well as insights from similar reports in the ex-service employment space. Pointedly they reflect and build on both FiMTs own changing approach[41] which reflects a great deal of exploration in this area in developing a new and impactful strategy. Testing and exploring this new approach led to further refinements of those initial recommendations, supported with demonstrable background and evidence as a result of the Roche sponsored summit 'Transforming Perceptions and Unlocking Ex-Service Talent'[42].

Ultimately each recommendation is interrelated; this is wholly reflective of the identified requirement to move beyond evolutionary and incremental development of an existing system to a place of real systemic change. This also reflects the need to drive collaboration between actors in the ex-service employment space - collaborating around sharing best practice, resources and insights as well as connecting services together to ensure a more coherent offering is essential to ensure a more holistic solution for ex-Service personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Increase dialogue and practical collaboration between business, military charities and other stakeholders; to share insights, identify common requirements and feed into the ongoing development of solutions which respond to Recommendations 2 to 8.

Ongoing collaboration between all actors interested in supporting ex-Service personnel is essential to ensure joined up services that effectively guide them into fulfilling and rewarding roles. The creation of a practical working group with representation from military charities, government, ex-Service personnel and

employers (both corporates and SMEs) with the goal of jointly developing the required action-oriented interventions, should support realisation of the recommendations of this report.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop a framework for the mapping and translation of military qualifications, experiences and skills into their commercial equivalents.

This should be undertaken through collaboration with the MoD, other agencies (such as DfE and DWP), professional membership bodies (such as FSB and CITB) and employers, and facilitated by a labour market specialist organisation. This will enable employers to better understand the relevance and usefulness of this experience and help military charities and other intermediaries to better support ex-Service personnel with employability and career support. The translation framework should be open source and freely available for use by third parties.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Develop opportunity matching technology built on the framework developed in Recommendation 2. This technology will work to match ex-Service talent with employers through skills and competencies, not CVs. Owned by those who partner in its creation, it will serve as a sustainable asset and the basis for ongoing collaboration.

Supported by the MoD, OVA and military charity community and delivered by a labour market specialist organisation, the technology will enable employers of all sizes, including SMEs, to utilise the military skills translation framework and take advantage of this talent pool. Finally, it will further enable intermediaries (such as military charities) and their beneficiaries to connect more easily and effectively to the business community.

---

41 FiMT (2019) Changing our Approach to Veterans' Employment (publication for Senior Leaders' Dinner 22 October 2019)
42 FiMT 'Changing our Approach to Veterans' Employment' see https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/20200117-Summit-report-final.pdf

RECOMMENDATION 4

Generate and share relevant, detailed and actionable labour market data on the supply and demand of ex-Service skills and competencies through the technology approach in Recommendation 3.

The current UK labour market is more fragmented and developing faster than ever; the types of jobs available - and the skills needed to do them - are constantly evolving. High quality information from both sides of the market is necessary to ensure relevant and useful career guidance is provided to ex-Service personnel, as well as those in transition, by better understanding the skills employers need. This data also has the potential to inform strategy, investment and commissioning by public and charitable organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Provide a means for ERS committed employers to access, engage and hire ex-Service personnel - and build this into the accreditation, assurance and monitoring processes.

Many ERS committed employers expressed the desire to support and employ more ex-Service personnel but lacked the means of connecting with the armed forces community on any more than an ad-hoc basis. With a means of connecting with ex-Service personnel in their local community, supporting and employing members of the ex-Service community would be far easier, and could become part of accreditation for 'gold' status, for instance. It could also be a key driver for realising the growth aspirations of the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC) and the Employer recognition Scheme (ERS).

RECOMMENDATION 6

Unlock the effective development of social capital for ex-Service personnel through networking, mentoring, advice, and support from the business community. Providing employers and their staff a means of offering support, guidance, mentoring and networking (which this report signals an appetite for) can help to overcome the barrier of low social capital. This could be achieved either in an analogue form (by creating partnerships with major employers) or through a digital platform, which would enable more effective engagement particularly with SME employers.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Enable employers to more easily offer additional forms of employment support to the service and ex-Service communities - including work experience, internships and apprenticeships. These programmes create opportunities for individuals to try new roles and explore industries and sectors, while reducing risk for both employers and developing knowledge and insight to inform their own decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Develop a compelling economic and quantitative business case of the commercial value organisations can derive by employing ex-Service personnel. While anecdotally clear, there is not yet a compelling economic business case (both commercially and in responding to organisational CSR) demonstrating the advantages of hiring from the ex-Service community. This piece of work would be an essential building block in helping to change employer perceptions of the ex-Service community and drive the sustainability of employment services for ex-Service personnel.

4.3 Areas for Further Exploration

While the findings of this research followed a clear flow in most areas, there remain a number of outstanding areas identified by the research from which firm conclusions have not been able to be drawn, or areas that, when touched upon, offered significant opportunity for further investigation and analysis.

Holistic employment support during transition. While this study did not explicitly explore the impact of interventions during transition, or transition holistically, it did provide the opportunity to seek experiential insights from the ex-Service respondents. It was clear from these results that the role and efficacy of transition, and its impact upon post-transition employment and career development, is both crucial and complex. The demographic spread of this study (many respondents having transitioned more than 5 years ago) precluded a focus on recent transitions, and clearly there is already significant and effective support in this space. However, there is perhaps an opportunity to investigate, given the responses in this study, whether there are additive solutions or services that could align with existing transition support in a changing labour market. Of particular value would be the growing importance of social capital, direct employer engagement, military-commercial skills translation, and the role of mentoring and peer-to-peer support.

The role of place? The role of place in the creation of equitable labour markets for those experiencing social disadvantage are widely accepted; it is also clear that solutions which understand local context and specific challenges are more likely to effectively engage with a target population. However, no comprehensive map of deprivation from an ex-Service personnel perspective currently exists. Therefore, it is recommended a mapping process is undertaken, to overlay areas of general deprivation (and therefore lower social capital and a more challenging labour market) with areas containing large pockets of ex-Service communities. If successful, this process would enable the easy identification of the areas/communities most in need of support from place-based initiatives.

A service (ex-Service) spouse/partner situational skillset? More than two thirds of the spouses/partners of ex-Service personnel believed they had gained valuable skills they might otherwise not have obtained as a result of their experiences as a service spouse/partner. This is potentially critically important in differentiating them from the remainder of the labour force and an advantage that should be capitalised on. Readily evidencing these skills through experiences understood by employers and importantly embraced by them is a route to ensuring equity and advantage. In order to understand and capitalise on this differentiation further exploration is required. Action oriented research focused on this hypothesis and routes to realise the potential advantage it identifies is a logical next step.

'Social' or 'Situational' disadvantage among spouses/partners? Disconnecting the challenges and difficulties for spouses/partners created directly as a result of their spouse/partner's military service, versus those faced by any spouse/partner looking to participate in the labour market, was remarkably difficult. The challenges faced by civilian families in managing childcare, full time work and other everyday demands can quite often be similar to those of military families. The initial research we have undertaken broadly found that the employment-related challenges faced by spouses/partners of ex-Service personnel are to a large extent similar to their non-military equivalents in a similar position. Therefore, a suggested next step would be to focus research on what these barriers and challenges are, and further investigate whether there are in fact barriers ex-Service spouses/partners face which the general population does not. This is the first step in then being able to identify effective interventions for this still under-studied group.

5

Project Methodology

5.1   Process

This consultation aimed to gather data and insight from across the labour market to understand the nature and scale of the challenge for the ex-Service community - both those who have served as well as their spouses/partners. To do this, the research used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to engage directly both sides of the labour market: on the one hand, ex-Service personnel and their spouses/partners who are either employed or job seeking (supply-side), and on the other hand, current and potential employers of the ex-Service community (demand-side). As part of this process we also met and consulted with relevant employment intermediaries and stakeholders for their perspective on the current challenges and opportunities, as well as desk research on the current skills translation frameworks being used and their efficacy.

5.2   Target Groups

On the supply-side, this consultation focused on people who had served in the British Armed Forces, as well as their spouses/partners. On the demand-side, the consultation focused on SMEs and start-ups; here we use the government definition of an SME as having less than or equal to 250 employees. The reason for choosing this employer cohort is given above - that this is generally an employer group facing greater struggles to engage with the ex-Service community. We also anticipated that smaller size businesses could present an increased appetite for initiatives aiming to reduce barriers between employers and local communities, in this case ex-Service personnel and their families. This is because such initiatives could facilitate their efforts to find and attract talent, which is a challenge they face when competing with larger employers in the labour market. Consequently, we anticipated that they represented a pool of employers that is particularly well-suited to the purposes of this project.

This research was also designed to generate analysis by geography. The aim was to better understand not only the macro challenges facing both sides of the market, but also regional concerns for both SMEs and the ex-Service community. In order for the insights from both sides of the market to be as relevant to each other as possible it was important to select a specific area to focus on. The geographical area chosen was that of the Solent, which covers the cities of Southampton, Portsmouth and Gosport, as well as the areas in between them (the survey scope did not cover or include the Isle of Wight for travel-to-work reasons). This choice of location was the result of a desire to choose an area with a significant contingent of Armed Forces and ex-Service personnel, as well as an engaged local authority/authorities to better enable connection and collaboration with local actors. Obviously the benefits of focusing on a specific area with these characteristics also has limitations, in that the relevance of these findings for every area of the UK cannot be guaranteed (indeed, it is expected that there will be at least a small degree of regional variation in experience everywhere). The need for further exploration and testing of the findings in other areas of the country is therefore discussed in the `areas for further exploration' section at the end of this report.

5.3   Research Design: Methods, Sampling and Segmentation

5.3.1   PHASE 1: EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS

This phase consisted of conducting exploratory semi-structured interviews with individuals that were highly knowledgeable of the challenges involved in forces transition and resettlement and the employment of ex-Service personnel, and/or of the barriers SMEs and start-ups experience when engaging with the ex-Service community for recruitment purposes.

The locally based individuals selected for these interviews came from the following target groups:

- The ex-Service community (x 2 individuals).

- SMEs and start-ups (x 2 individuals).

- Third sector organisations and networks that support ex-Service personnel securing civilian work (x 2 individuals).

The aims of Phase 1 were three-fold: first, to collect initial high-level information relevant to the consultations' research questions (ensuring that any key themes, insights or questions were not overlooked in the main study); second, to establish a network of relevant contacts in the target group communities; third, to acquire access to relevant information and knowledge that is already available in different forms (such as reports and databases) in the target group communities.

The purpose of these interviews was to provide knowledge for further developing the questionnaires used in the later phases of the consultation. For example, this helped to identify any issues in the proposed lines of questioning. Through these interviews we also tested the pertinence of the themes outlined above and adjusted these as needed by changing or adding new themes to be explored in the later phases of the consultation. These interviews were largely conducted in person. For this phase, we drew on semi-structured and open questions, which the interviewees could take in the direction they thought important whilst still being

guided by the interviewer. This aimed to ensure we were able to capture as broad a range of issues and themes as possible, so that issues not yet identified in the desk-based research were not overlooked.

5.3.2   PHASE 2: STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND DIGITAL SURVEY

During Phase 2, we developed and conducted structured interviews and a digital survey, running largely in parallel and based on the outputs from the above process. The digital survey aimed to collect demographic information from respondents (ethnicity, age, time served, which service they served in, time since transition and current employment status), along with a series of questions around the question themes developed in Phase 1. These themes are below. The questions were formed as neutral questions, with answers ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. This provided predominately quantitative data around the question themes. The survey questions can be found at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research.

The digitally administered survey was used as the first point of contact for both ex-Service personnel and their spouses/partners as well as SMEs - sent around through various newsletters, websites, social media and through connections offered by community groups. The survey contained a prompt at the end, inviting respondents to add their contact details if interested in a follow-up interview, which was subsequently arranged. The pool of respondents were therefore a subset of the survey respondents - to ensure the qualitative responses were consistent with the quantitative, and not skewed by a different pool of respondents. These structured interviews lasted around 30 minutes, were undertaken over the phone, and organised according to the report's themes. These questions aimed to build on the answers received in the quantitative survey, exploring in greater depth people's experiences, including barriers to work, experiences in the labour market, and skills translation. The interview

question structure used for this process can be found at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research.

5.3.3   PHASE 3: FOCUS GROUPS/WORKSHOPS

Phase 3 involved follow up focus groups/workshops, after the completion of the surveys and qualitative interviews and some initial thematic analysis and undertaken with members of the same group who had engaged with the original survey. The aim of this additional step was to test our initial analysis and the conclusions that had come out of Phase 2, in order to minimise the chance of misinterpreting our findings and therefore reaching erroneous conclusions. We shared some of the findings that had come out of the different sessions (again based around the core themes explored), and

asked both SMEs and ex-Service personnel to discuss them and the reasons behind them, as well as to explore common themes emerging from the interviews that the structure of Phase 2 did not allow us to explore.

This Phase involved two focus groups/workshops - one with respondents in leadership positions in a small sample of SMEs, and another with ex-Service personnel (the small sample size of our spouse/partner respondent pool meant an additional focus group/workshop was not necessary here). The focus groups were two-hour sessions, and semi-structured according to questions and insight that had emerged under the research's core themes. The structure of this session can be found at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research.

5.4   Research Themes

As discussed above, the questions and themes were developed in line with the research aims, an extensive literature review to understand many of the challenges, barriers and opportunities, and the initial semi-structured conversations which aimed to test some of the initial assumptions. The broad question themes are below:

SMEs:

- Organisational Data

- AFC and ERS

- Current Employment Situation

- Employing Ex-Service Personnel

- Skills

- Future Solutions

Ex-Service Personnel:

- Demographic Data

- Employment

- Finding and Securing Work

- Skills

- Transition

- Engaging with Employers

Spouses/Partners of Ex-Service Personnel:

- Demographic Data

- Employment

- Finding and Securing Work

- Skills

- Engaging with employers

6

Detailed Findings & Analysis of Primary Data Sources

6.1   SMEs

6.1.1   INTRODUCTION

We received 89 individual online quantitative survey responses (the survey questions, visual presentations of the full results and the full data sets are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) from representatives of SMEs based, or with an operational presence in the Solent. These were generated as a result of:

- engagement through LinkedIn groups specifically targeted at SMEs and in the geographic area of focus,

- engagement with local and regional business representative and networking groups such as the FSB and Chamber of Commerce,

- engagement with public sector and not-profit organisations such as Local Authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnership,

- direct marketing and proactive engagement of SME identified organisations by telephone and email to elicit responses, and

- attendance at business and networking events to raise the profile of our research and engage respondents.

The online survey asked questions which focused in 5 key areas (AFC & ERS, Current Employment Situation, Employing Ex-Service Personnel, Skills, Future Solutions) in addition to capturing organisational data to enable segmentation and exploration of the results.

We completed 30 interviews by telephone (the interview questions and the thematic findings of these interviews are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) with SME respondents to the online survey who had provided their contact details for this purpose. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes each and explored areas

identified for further research and focus as a result of the online survey data collected.

Eight representatives of SMEs who had responded to our online survey attended a workshop (the workshop areas of exploration and the thematic findings of this workshop are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) which was designed to further explore the thematic areas identified in the telephone interviews and also to explore solutions that addressed the challenges and opportunities identified by the primary and secondary research and data capture to date.

This primary data has been examined as a whole and thematically. The data was further segmented by organisational data fields to explore factors which may have affected responses, and which are material to the findings and any recommendations.

6.1.2   ORGANISATIONAL DATA

- 57% of respondent organisations had 1-49 employees with the remaining 43% having 50-250.

Every Section[43] of the UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code was represented by the respondents.

- 56% of the respondent's organisations currently employed ex-Service personnel. 10% reported that they didn't know.

It was identified that there was little if any correlation when segmenting the data by organisational size (number of employees: 1-49, 50-250[44]). Unsurprisingly when segmenting by those respondents who had employed ex-Service personnel there was a marked increase in positivity about the cohort. Equally with those respondents who were committed to the ERS there was a marked increase in appetite in terms

43 ONS 'UK Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Hierarchy' see: https://onsdigital.github.io/dp-classification-tools/standard-industrial-classification/ONS_SIC_hierarchy_view.html

44 Simply Business see https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/articles/2018/12/what-is-an-sme/

of future solutions, both explored in this research and more generally in meeting their aspirations.

6.1.3 ARMED FORCES COVENANT & EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME

The research found that while there was a reasonable awareness of the AFC and ERS (almost half of respondents were aware of it) less than a quarter of respondents were signatories of the AFC or committed to the ERS. When information was provided on the AFC and the ERS by the research team there was a growing and demonstrable interest to be involved on the part of respondents and their organisations. A number of organisational respondents identified that one of the key drivers to committing to the AFC or ERS is their wider work and positioning with the service community; almost making it a commercial 'must have'. There were however a number of misconceptions about the organisational size requirements (or lack of them), with a number of respondents demonstrating a lack of awareness that SMEs can sign the AFC and commit to the ERS. The widely held belief was that these opportunities were only for large and national organisations. Importantly from the perspective of this research, there was very little understanding of the purpose of the AFC or the commercial benefits of making commitments such as the ERS.

In terms of our respondents:

- 49% of respondents were aware of the ERS.

- Those who reported they employed ex-Service personnel currently were more than twice as likely to be aware of the ERS than those who didn't.

- 25% of respondents identified their organisation was a signatory of the AFC ERS. Almost 14% identified that they did not know.

- Of the 22 AFC ERS committed respondents:

  - 8 were bronze, 8 silver and 1 gold, the remaining 5 did not know.

Only half of ERS committed employers identified it as a proven route to accessing ex-Service talent pools.

- 63% of them believe it has allowed them to fully meet their aspirations in widely recognising and supporting the ex-Service community.

Of those committed to the ERS there is a significant gap between their expectations or aspirations of so doing and what they had realised as a result of their commitment. Also of those committed to the ERS, the majority reported having done so as a result of a personal or lived connection (either of themselves or their organisation), or due to involvement more widely with the ex-Service or service community (such as in a contracting or commercial sense), or due to their wider support to the military charity sector (such as explicitly supporting with fundraising).

The opportunity to capitalise on the appetite, positivity and importantly aspirations of AFC and ERS committed employers who are ready, willing and able to make an impact needs to be seized quickly and before it starts to wane. Providing the network of ERS employers with demonstrable and proven routes for them to realise not only their pledges, but the commercial benefits of such 'shared value' seeking activity, at scale and volume is paramount. From a strict 'marketing' perspective the customer of the ERS is the employer (or is at least perceived to be); a customer whose appetite and aspiration is not presently being sated.

6.1.4 CURRENT EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

The vast majority of SME respondents identified sourcing the right talent and skills is critical to the future growth of their organisations and more than two thirds readily identified they or their industry were facing or experiencing a skills shortage.

- 93% stated that sourcing the right skills and talent is critical to their future growth and success.

- 70% identified that their industry sector was facing skills shortages.

65%

identified that their organisation was facing skills shortages.

- 68% identified were using external job boards to advertise and fill their organisations roles followed by employee referrals (59%), internal jobs boards (49%) and recruitment agencies (47%).

Organisational processes and systems were identified as a key potential barrier to proactive engagement and driving up levels of access to ex-Service talent.

The role of HR colleagues and their processes, which include sourcing and sifting CVs and applications, were identified as limiting factors in increased engagement and success in this area without proactive change or involvement. It was identified that the volume of applications received to publicly advertised roles means sifting and sorting is done electronically or in bulk (key word etc.), or by individuals using a clear, risk-mitigating brief - suggesting the importance of CVs and initial applications in the current recruitment paradigm. Importantly though, it was reported that for most organisations this sort of change and movement away from traditional methods and processes was possible, but yet to occur as there was no catalyst present. The identified reliance by some on transactional and public online job boards and services was also identified as a potential barrier but one it was clear there was appetite to overcome if

success or improved access to an untapped talent pool could be proven at similar or lower costs.

It was felt that most organisations view recruitment as a risk and therefore the recruitment process as a risk mitigator. *"If we cannot find ways to mitigate the risk posed by an 'individual' then they don't get through."* As a result, SME respondents reported wanting to primarily evidence technical or specialist skills first in their recruitment processes (these may even be context or situation specific). If these skills and experiences are evident then the 'process' moves the application and candidate on. The wider, softer, more general-purpose skills came second in this approach. Interestingly it was reported that these general-purpose skills often did not feature heavily (if at all) in the person specification or the brief for application sifting. *"Employers don't always know what it is they want".* This was proactively identified by respondents as a flawed process and one which is very 'human', and open to perceptional bias.

Thematically there is a consistent narrative that identifies a conscious desire by organisations and individuals to identify industry, sector and organisational transferable experience that is indicated as a mitigator to the perceived risk of recruiting those without it, notably ex-Service personnel. **The tools currently available such as networking sites, recruitment sites and aggregators, jobs boards and internal recruitment portals are all inherently riddled with a combination of 'process' and 'human' driven bias. This current recruitment paradigm is therefore challenging for any individual or group of individuals who are different and thereby potentially misunderstood - their risk and value is entirely open to the bias of perception.** While this was widely recognised by the respondents, the tools available don't allow them to operate a new process, merely to participate in the current one - *"SMEs are too small to create their own".* With consistency it was reported that all of the recruitment 'tools' rely on some level of employer driven human intervention. It was unanimously reported that there is no simple answer. This appeared especially

true when coupled with affordability. Respondents felt that recruitment agencies remove the required human intervention of the employer but at a cost that SMEs cannot reportedly bear. Interestingly respondents felt that recruitment agencies do not necessarily add any more science to the process or generate a better outcome, just the replacement of one human resource at the employer's end with one at theirs.

6.1.5   EMPLOYING EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL

Individual SME respondents reported some quite nuanced perceptions of ex-Service personnel. Some of these were driven by rank and service, and drew upon views of segmented groups such as Commissioned Officers v's SNCO's and 'Sgt Majors' v's 'Squaddies'. When exploring the source of these perceptions it was reported that they were created and managed primarily by the media through TV, films and the news. They were also driven by service charities and service focused documentaries on specific 'causes' and events. In particular these created an expectation of injury and disability and not necessarily a physical one. On the flipside of this though there was a reported focus and understanding especially on overcoming adversity through rehabilitation. There were a number of reported observations about 'PTSD' and wider mental wellbeing and a number of questions and it appeared concerns, about an employer's ability to cope and deal with these potential challenges.

This external media perception was recognised by SME respondents, who had heard and seen these preconceptions reported. Broadly, respondents were able to identify and disregard some of the more 'extreme' perceptions that came across here - including the widely purported view of ex-Service personnel being 'mad, bad and sad' and of them having the potential to be violent. Evidently, however, while these more extreme preconceptions were disregarded, biases clearly remained among the group - often subconsciously. This is clear in some of the more negative associations respondents held towards ex-Service personnel outlined below.

Positively SME representatives reported behaviours attitudes and skills they perceived ex-Service personnel as having and exhibiting with clarity and consistency:

- Socially engaging - a desire for camaraderie

- Self-disciplined

- The ability to work in a team

- Leadership

- Clarity of thought

- Problem solving

- Resilience

- The ability to work under pressure

- Well disciplined "*It is an extreme sanction environment. You just tell them to do it and they do it.*"

- Well presented, good examples, reliable and credible

Conversely though there were a number of widely held and reported perceptions with negative connotations:

- Directive - "*tell, tell, tell*"

- Authoritative - "*bootcamp mentality*"

- Struggle with ambiguity "*a low bullshit threshold!*"

- Inflexible "*Gung-ho, they just go for it!*"

- Lacking independence of thought

- Lacking in commerciality and financial literacy

- Lacking exposure to business and the way they work/make money

It appeared and was directly reported that *"Employers think in stereotypes, they are either Shouty Sergeants or Colonel Blimps".* It was also identified that for some, this perception and mindset meant that ex-Service personnel had to overcome the backward step or disadvantage this gave them just to get to a level playing field. The conscious and subconscious bias created as a result of these perceptions was only reported to be counterable by explicit action on the part of the individual ex-Service person in their actions through application, or by the SME through mandated and practiced action in the recruitment process.

In interviews and the workshop, there was an interesting, regularly repeated discussion on the role of 'fit' in recruitment. The discussion focused on an exploration of how 'fit' can be measured and defined and subsequently how it can be used as a selection criteria. The conclusion was that if the positive perception of ex-Service personnel – their attitude, behaviour, morals and ethics – was sold by the ex-Service person rather than left to chance and potentially missed, this would support a recruitment decision based on 'fit'.

70%

of all respondents (100% of ERS committed respondents) identified that in their organisations' experience ex-Service personnel made great employees.

- 52% of respondents whose organisations did not currently employ ex-Service personnel reported the same.

74%

of all respondents (100% of ERS committed respondents) identified an organisational desire to access and hire from the ex-Service community.

- 91% of respondents whose organisations currently employed ex-Service personnel reported the same.

In exploring this at interview it was also clear that it was this experience that drove them to be more likely to recruit ex-Service personnel and was a key driver in their appetite to gain more access to this talent pool. It is clear that individuals and organisations who are knowledgeable about the military from their own or organisational experience or have had a previous good experience with recruiting ex-Service personnel are more likely to do so again proactively. There was also a clear appetite from employers with little or no ex-experience of employing ex-Service personnel to do so for a variety of perceptional and philanthropic reasons. In a small number of cases the commercial business case for doing so appeared important to the respondent and their organisation, but this knowledge and focus was limited.

33%

of respondents reported their organisation found it difficult to engage with the ex-Service community and 27% found the same with ex-Service organisations and intermediaries.

There is a widely reported experience of difficulty in engaging with this talent pool and those who act as intermediaries to it. This was also reported as a perceptional barrier by those with limited experience in this space. Organisations with a specific requirement or driver to source ex-Service talent reported with consistency a great deal of investment in managing and developing their relationships with actors involved in transition and the wider military network to ensure they continued to gain access and attract and hire the talent they require. There were however a number of organisations who had the desire and appetite to engage but limitations on their resource and financial commitments to so doing, who met with challenges around the proactivity of the reciprocal actors. Of those who reported attempted engagement with the cohort of service personnel in transition and immediately post discharge through the advertised channels the majority had experienced ambivalence to engage and were left disengaged as a result. The costs of engaging with those in transition through these routes or more widely through networking events, jobs fairs and the like were widely cited as not returning on the investment of employer resources. This is widely reflective of one of the challenges expected of SME engagement with this cohort. Charity and publicly funded provision is limited in its scope by the available financial and subsequently human capital resources or contractual constraints. It is therefore entirely expected that decisions are made about engaging employers and relationship management based on realising the best possible return on public and charitable investment. While understandable, given the limited resources and other constraints this limits the ability to meaningfully engage the UK's 5.8m SMEs; an opportunity missed if there are routes to so doing within the constraints identified.

Interestingly, **while there was a clear and demonstrable appetite to engage attract and hire ex-Service talent there appears to be very limited organisational disclosure of veteran status of the current employees. Identifying and celebrating the ex-Service talent that is inherent within these organisations may prove a successful** route to attracting and engaging more of it. It may also prove a beneficial route to identifying mentors (both formal and informal) who could act as points of advice and guidance for new and prospective ex-Service employees.
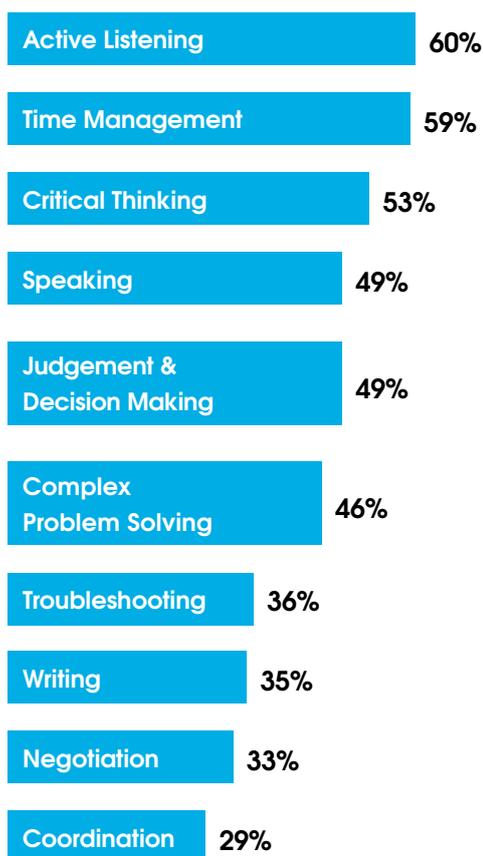
36%

of respondents identified that the CVs and application forms of ex-Service personnel were difficult to understand and identify their transferable skills gained from the military.

The anecdotal reports and perceptions of poorly written and incomprehensible ex-Service applications and CVs was borne out by the research. Inaccessible language and acronyms were reported as being experienced by more than a third of respondents. Connected to the above, there were consistent and regular comments on the lack of commercialising or tailoring language in the CVs and application forms received from ex-Service personnel. Counter to this point though, there was a widely reported experience that ex-Service personnel are much better at selling themselves, their experience and skills, face to face and at interview - These two points appear counter to each other, but would suggest that written 'traditional' approaches such as the CVs and applications of ex-Service personnel under-sell their skills and experiences and potentially seek to offer employers something counter to that which they perceive they require.

6.1.6   SKILLS

Respondents identified (from the 34 top level skills in the O*NET skills taxonomy) up to 10 general purpose skills that were most in demand and important to their organisation. The top 10 were:

Skill	Percentage
Active Listening	60%
Time Management	59%
Critical Thinking	53%
Speaking	49%
Judgement & Decision Making	49%
Complex Problem Solving	46%
Troubleshooting	36%
Writing	35%
Negotiation	33%
Coordination	29%

The top 10 general purpose skills organisations identified as most in demand and important to them aligned well with those ex-Service personnel identified they gained in service. The top 6 for SMEs correlated almost exactly with those of ex-Service personnel identifying a clear overlap in both supply and demand (the same was true for the top 3 identified by SMEs when examining the skills reported by ex-Service spouses/partners). This suggests that given some of the previous findings on SMEs experience of sourcing and attracting ex-Service applications there is potentially a significant mismatch between what the 'supply' (ex-Service community) has to offer and what they are selling, or conversely that what employers are seeking through their recruitment activity is not what they actually want or need. **An important observation when triangulated with wider employer experiences is that the current recruitment paradigm (HR Process, system and CV driven) is aimed at mitigating risk, not identifying value. Therefore, the mismatch appears to be more likely one of CVs which in their purpose attempt to communicate value rather than mitigating a perceived risk which**

is being sought by the decision maker. Critically this is a challenge that requires systemic change to overcome - a new recruitment paradigm.

Of particular note and potentially of critical importance, coupled with the comments on the identified apparent alignment of general-purpose skills between supply and demand (employers), is the mismatch in the perceptions and reality by actors on both sides. Importantly their impact on the way in which ex-Service personnel sell themselves in applying for roles. Organisational respondents reported a perceived set of attitudes and behaviours they felt were analogous with ex-Service personnel's skills. These while broadly positive in no way aligned with the actual depth and value of skills ex-Service personnel reported they had gained as a result of service. In addition, ex-Service personnel's own expectations of the perception employers held about them was equally variant. In short it appears that employers' perceptions of ex-Service personnel, their skills and behaviours are not wholly reflective of the actual situation and are not being countered adequately by ex-Service personnel in their marketing tools (CVs/application forms/LinkedIn profiles). In addition it was widely accepted by SME respondents that the skills they identified demand for and which aligned with those gained in service were difficult to evidence and translate via traditional methods such as CVs and application forms and would in the majority of cases be explored at interview in determining 'fit'.

A number of respondents identified that ex-Service personnel often had a great deal of directly transferable qualifications/skills or experiences which aligned with their roles, organisations, industries, and sectors. Ultimately though, it was reported that they equally as often lacked the entry level qualifications or 'tickets' that would enable the first recruitment hurdle to be overcome more easily such as CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) cards.

When exploring qualifications, especially those gained in the military, there was an identifiable lack

of understanding not of military qualifications (they often clearly have a civilian comparative, or are even described or awarded exactly as in the civilian world), but of their content and transferability. "*One apprenticeship is not the same as another….*"

6.1.7 FUTURE SOLUTIONS

It was felt that in the current status quo, there were very limited routes to attract, engage, understand and hire ex-Service talent.

- That the routes that did exist lacked proactivity i.e. "*they were black holes*" for information and communications. - "*At its worst just faceless jobs boards*"

- That those ex-Service personnel who had built and curated their networks in person and online were easier to identify, access and engage.

Notably **there was a real recognition by the respondents of the talent pool that exists, but a generalised frustration at their inability to access it. There was clearly and with consistency a real appetite to find new and different ways of accessing and understanding the talent pool and its inherent skills and abilities.**

60%

of respondents identified their organisation would benefit from a solution that made it easier to identify and understand the transferable skills of ex-Service personnel.

69%

of all respondents (79% of ERS committed respondents) reported their organisation would be interested in exploring the benefits of a future model that provided access to and engagement of ex-Service talent.

There was also a demonstrable appetite to offer wider employability interventions or offerings to the cohort through a wide variety of mechanisms from work experience to apprenticeships. This appetite to offer 'exposure' opportunities that mutually benefit both partners and the preference of SMEs to recruit 'known entities' or look beyond traditional public methods for their recruitment, provide an opportunity to realise competitive advantage for ex-Service personnel through managed network and social capital development alongside meaningful and material employability interventions.

- Respondents reported that their organisations had an appetite to offer employment related opportunities with 55% offering the potential of work experience, 33% apprenticeships, 33% mentoring, 29% knowledge and skills sharing, and 28% wider employability support.

In exploring current recruitment practice especially focused on accessing supply, the role of 'aggregators' seems important. The preference appeared to be to use one organisation (aggregator) to deluge the market (primarily online) rather than doing it yourself site by site and provider by provider.

- These aggregators fees reportedly worked out to be on average £350 to advertise 1 role for 1 month.

- The success rate in terms of sustainable hiring (one that lasts in excess of 6 months) through this route was broadly reported to be 1 in 3, and therefore in the region of £1k per hire.

- This was therefore considered to be broadly the commercial (external) unit cost of a sustainable hire to an SME regardless of the route if they were proactively sourcing from the market and not relying on word of mouth.

Recruitment agencies were identified as being beyond the scope of most SMEs for mainstream (not specialist or niche roles) hires as their fees were upwards of £2.5-3k and potentially circa 20-25% of annual salary. When further exploring business models and approaches given the findings above, especially focused on how revenue could be realised and how a future solution could potentially be funded, it was felt that SMEs were more comfortable with 'transactional costs' (fee for service type one-off payments that provide clarity for budgeting) rather than memberships, recurring payments or subscriptions. Cash flow was considered an issue.

The transferability, equivalence and understanding of qualifications was identified as an important area. There are a number of readily identifiable publicly available frameworks[45] to define or achieve equivalence at relatively low or no cost. It seems embedding these into a future solution would aid engagement and understanding. Importantly though the ability to describe what these qualifications mean in practice; what they have enabled the individual to do and how, and importantly the skills and experience this means they have developed, was identified as more important than the qualification or merely stating it's achievement.

Working with organisations to develop an understanding and focus on the impact they wish to deliver and realise as a result of their engagement with the ex-Service community is an important factor. Presently the focus appears to be on the

achievement of philanthropic goals and not the achievement of readily identifiable shared value. This shared value has the potential of becoming a force multiplier and also potentially forms the basis of the organisations commercial business case for scaling and growing a reliance on ex-Service talent.

When focused practically on future solutions, it was felt that the value of the 'human' factor should be explored and wherever possible digital routes to replicate and enable it without bias should be sourced i.e. analysis of personal characteristics, team fit and behaviours. The use and role of wider psychometric and profiling tools beyond skills and experience to respond to employers' feelings about losing the 'human' factor in building a new recruitment paradigm is important to respond to. Explicitly it was felt that for any solution to be really valuable:

- The potential pipeline of talent needs to be at scale and therefore include those ex-Service personnel at all stages of their lives and therefore be a 'through-life service' for them.

- It needs to act as a network of networks - as a word of mouth/knowledge hub.

- It needs to be easy to use and avoid being over complex.

- Provide filtering and weeding (avoid plain text input).

- Remove false positives through intelligent activity.

- Contain employer driven profiles.

- The potential of a human on the end - a contact centre solution of help and support for both supply and demand.

---

45 UK Government see https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels

6.2   Ex-Service Personnel

6.2.1   INTRODUCTION

We received 197 individual online quantitative survey responses (the survey questions, visual presentations of the full results and the full data sets are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) from ex-Service personnel who live within a 'commutable' distance of the Solent. These were generated as a result of:

• engagement through LinkedIn and Facebook groups targeted at ex-Service personnel,

• engagement with service charities such as the White Ensign Association and wider charitable and not-profit actors in the local area,

• engagement with specialist ex-Service recruiters such as Salute My Job, and

• engagement with the other organisations involved in transition and employment support such as BuildForce.

The online survey asked questions which focused in 5 key areas (Employment, Finding & Securing Work, Skills, Transition, (their experience of) Employers) in addition to capturing demographic data to enable segmentation and exploration of the results.

We completed 50 interviews by telephone (the interview questions and the thematic findings of these interviews are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) with ex-Service personnel respondents to the online survey who had provided their contact details for this purpose. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes each and explored areas identified for further research and focus as a result of the online survey data collected.

Eight ex-Service personnel who had responded to our online survey attended a workshop (the workshop areas of exploration and the thematic findings of this workshop are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) which was designed to further explore the thematic areas identified in the telephone interviews and also to explore solutions that addressed the challenges and opportunities identified by the primary and secondary research and data capture to date.

This primary data has been examined as a whole and thematically. The data was further segmented by demographic data fields to explore factors which may have affected responses, and which are material to the findings and any recommendations.

6.2.2   DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographically our respondents proved to be broadly representative and in a large enough sample size to be able to segment the results by identified demographic markers. Comparison with expected norms, wider national, regional and cohort specific data sets has been sought wherever possible (seniority and length of service comparators were difficult to identify in the available comparator data due to its presentation of a holistic veteran population rather than working age only veterans[46]).

• 57% of respondents were former Army personnel (54% of UK Armed Forces Regular Personnel[47]). 30% had served in the Royal Navy (23% of UK Armed Forces Regular Personnel) which was as expected given the geographical focus in the Solent. A further 12% had served in the Royal Air Force (23% of UK Armed Forces Regular Personnel).

• Our respondents were predominantly experienced and senior with 72% of them having served more than 8 years and 50% of them having served more than 16 years.

46 Royal British Legion (2014) 'A UK Household Survey of the Ex-Service Community' see https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/rbl_household_survey_report.pdf?sfvrsn=5bcbae4f_4

47 MoD (2019) 'UK Armed Forces Quarterly Service Personnel Statistics' p. 4 see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779859/201901-_SPS.pdf

- A third of respondents were former Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) and almost 26% were former Commissioned Officers (half of the UK's veteran population left service as a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) or higher[48]).

- Our respondents were split almost equally between those with more, and those with less than 8 years' service.

- Almost 52% of respondents had left the forces more than 8 years ago. 24% had left more than 4 years ago and the remaining 24% had left in the past 4 years.

- Almost 68% of the respondents were aged between 35 and 54 (compared with 52% of the working age veteran population[49]). In addition, almost 97% of them identified as white (98.2% of UK veterans identified the same[50]).

6.2.3   EMPLOYMENT

In line with previous demographic studies the rate of unemployment reported by the respondents was almost twice the UK average. While the most recent and detailed study of its type was published in 2014[51], the macro economic situation influencing employment is broadly similar as is the extant market and offer of support available, and therefore it is unsurprising this has altered.

- 77.7% of the respondents were in paid employment which is comparable to the UK employment rate of 76.2%52.

7.6%

of respondents were not in employment and were seeking work which is twice the UK rate of unemployment which stands at 3.8%[53].

While rank and length of service were not identified as influencing factors in unemployment, the time since discharge appears so. Those who had left the services less than 2 years ago reported a rate of more than 22%. The findings reported and explored in the qualitative investigation suggest a number of factors at play in this, but in summary: the time lag of the creation and utilisation of social capital, a lack of holistic employment preparedness (including CVs, advice and guidance) and a general lack of 'actionable' knowledge all manifest from the point of discharge until such a time as the required level and proficiency of these has been reached that enables the individual to realise their employment aspirations independently. Reducing this time period and ensuring the level of independence is replicable through-life varies significantly based on an individuals' experience of transition.

There were a number of critical findings in the research when exploring under-employment and the connection between aspiration and expectation. These are explored in some detail in the following paragraphs given the universal and experiential nature of their reported manifestation.

48 Royal British Legion (2014), op. cit.

49 ibid.

50 ibid.

51 ibid.

52 ONS 'Employment rate (aged 16 to 64, seasonally adjusted)' see https://www.ons.gov.uk/ employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/timeseries/lf24/lms

53 ONS (2019), op. cit.

More than

22%

of respondents felt their transferable military skills were not being fully utilised in their civilian employment.

This proportion increased as length of service decreased, with the same correlation for those with lower levels of seniority by rank. This indicates therefore, that it is proportionately less likely you are utilising your transferable military skills the shorter your period of service and the lower your rank. This is borne out by the data with in excess of 30% of former Other Ranks (ORs) and Junior Non Commissioned Officers (JNCOs) (compared to 22% of all respondents), and those with less than 8 years' service reporting not using their transferable military skills in their employment. When further exploring this with respondents who were younger and had relatively shorter periods of service, they consistently reported they felt they had 'lost' their military years and in consequence lagged behind their peers in terms of transferable skills and experience - that importantly they felt they had gained little of transferability.

49%

of respondents felt they did not receive comparable pay and seniority to that which they experienced in service.

There was an identifiable trend of this proportion decreasing as lengths of service and seniority by rank increased. Former Commissioned Officers were more likely to be receiving comparable pay and seniority with a reduction through rank and seniority indicated in the data.

47%

of respondents felt their civilian employment did not offer comparable opportunities for promotion and development as they had experienced in service.

There was however little correlation when the data was segmented, and this may therefore illustrate the variance in experience and in particular the practice and approach of variant employers. It should also be noted that the research clearly identifies a recognition of ex-Service personnel being well trained and developed personally and professionally by both employer respondents and themselves, and therefore this may be an 'expectation' founded on previous military experience which is not being realised for all individuals (all employees) rather than this cohort exclusively.

31%

of respondents said their civilian employment did not fully meet their aspirations.

Rank was again a factor in this area with former Commissioned Officers significantly more likely to be in employment which fully met their aspirations. In exploration, aspiration was identified as a mixture of factors and included those explored here (utilising skills, comparable pay, seniority and development), in addition to a number of personal factors. *"We expect what we are led to believe, we aspire to whatever we choose."* It is therefore *asserted by the research that* between a third and a half of ex-Service personnel are in some way underemployed in comparison to their aspiration and the identified factors that influence it.

There is demonstrable value in managing expectations especially in understanding the civilian world of work and employers. These expectations, especially focused on variant approaches to development and progression, would be an interesting intervention especially if as is suggested, this research has identified a mismanagement of expectation in this area. It was widely suggested that managing these expectations (and importantly developing knowledge) especially when focused on specific industries, roles, and employers is best done by those with a lived experience and through formal and informal mentoring routes. *"My aspiration didn't change but the reality compared to my expectation meant I had more to learn and more work to do."*

It has been identified as an important factor in realising the best possible outcome, to hold and work towards high, but realistic levels of aspirations. The nature of military service, the structured approach to development and progression, and the confidence instilled, mean high levels of achievement for many who had not previously been presented with such opportunity. This confidence, focus and therefore aspiration has been identified as resistant to 'dampening' by the management of expectations which was widely demanded and, it is suggested, required if a realistic plan is to be built and achieved in realising aspiration.

Structured management of expectations or more importantly knowledge building, founded on data and insight development is critical to any future solution. There are a number of routes to achieve this which have proven successful in varying settings, but in the context of ex-Service personnel, the paradigm of military pedagogy appears of critical importance. How service personnel learn, how they experience learning in-service, and how that differs to other settings such as academia is important when considering solutions to developing networks and social capital that realise learning and therefore knowledge:

- "*We learn through experience*"

- "*We learn from those who have done it before*"

- "*We learn from those with more experience*"

- "*We learn from others' mistakes and successes*"

- "*We are good at learning*"

- "*It would be better if we could identify the holes earlier. There are unknowns that we should know. People have gone before us and accessing their knowledge is critical.*"

Learning from those with more experience and those who have gone/done before is reflective of how knowledge is built in service.

Aligning this with the trust inherent in individuals with whom there is a lived experience connection (of service) and therefore trust, both in a formal and informal setting, was widely suggested as the best route to managing expectations and developing knowledge. This was especially true when focused on specific industries, roles, and employers. This research therefore clearly suggests ex-Service peer-to-peer support, mentoring and guidance play a key role in effective employability solutions.

6.2.4   TRANSITION

In exploring transition and individuals' experiences of it, its timing and impact on successful outcomes was of particular note. It is also noted that given almost 76% of respondents had left the forces more than 4 years ago, the views they expressed were not necessarily reflective of the current transition process and services, but of their lived experience of them. This is further evidenced by the data, that when segmented by the length of time since discharge there is

a marked difference between those who left more, and those who left less than 8 years ago.

- 65% of respondents identified that transition was not fully effective in enabling them to find and secure employment.

Length of service and rank are significant factors when further exploring this result. Almost 90% of ORs responded negatively (not fully effective), and more than 75% of JNCOs, compared to 56% of Commissioned Officers. More than 72% of those with less than 8 years' service responded negatively to this question. 69% of those who had left the forces more than 8 years ago responded negatively to this question compared with 60% of those who left less than 8 years ago.

- 49% of respondents identified that resettlement did not start early enough for them to make a good transition.

More than 62% of those with lengths of service between 4 and 16 years responded negatively (did not start early enough), compared with around 35% of those with more than 16 years' service. This is equally reflected when exploring the data segmented by rank. More than 56% of former JNCOs responded negatively compared with less than 38% for former Commissioned Officers.

66%

of respondents identified that starting to focus on resettlement earlier would have enabled a better transition.

Almost two thirds of respondents identified transition was not fully effective in enabling them to find and secure employment. Almost half suggested it did not start early enough and

two thirds thought if started earlier it would have enabled a better transition. Almost half (47.2%) of respondents identified they were not fully confident in translating and communicating their transferable skills to employers (in CVs and at interview) as a result of interventions during transition. This reduced to 39% for those who had left the forces in the last 8 years. Rank and length of service were identified as significant factors in this area. Almost 65% of those with less than 4 years' service answered in the negative (not fully confident) compared with just over 35% for those with 16 years or more service.

Transition best practice especially the role of facilitating employment and employer exposures in a managed way, through work experience and training were identified as critical factors in successful outcomes. The opportunity to further develop knowledge through real life and in person engagement and activity is another significant route to developing social networks and therefore social capital. The continued and augmented provision of these through a growth in opportunities and employer engagement, the availability of mentors (formal and informal) in a managed way, is identified as having the potential of driving up successful outcomes.

In addition to the above the value of wider employability type interventions such as work experience and work placements were also cited consistently as valuable post discharge. The development of insight and importantly the valuable and relevant networks they delivered was highlighted as an important factor.

Individuals reported high aspirations on discharge and during transition. Potentially as a result of military service encouraging aspiration. *"Resettlement advice reinforces the stereotype and expectation that employers in the civilian world want our skills."* However, when exploring how this translated into expectations and planning, respondents identified an issue or difficulty in assessing 'what is really out there' and what

to expect as a result of being 'inside the wire'. *"There is a myth that we will be snapped up. This is our expectation. We are institutionalised and trust what we are told in service."* **In terms of managing expectations toward the realisation of aspiration, it was reported that the advice and guidance available both 'inside the wire' and during transition focused on local labour markets, specific opportunities and career paths was limited by the exposure of those providing the advice to such knowledge and information. Pragmatically it was recognised that these limitations did not exist by design, but importantly this was reported as an opportunity to augment this advice through a network of those with lived experience and knowledge.**

In exploring solutions to develop knowledge and receive advice and guidance, it was identified that individuals would benefit from a wider network of advice and guidance in service especially from mentors with lived experience. It was also identified that there is a potential role for more experienced civilian and importantly 'local' and place-based advice and guidance to identify what the real-life barriers and hurdles are, and how to overcome them. It was reported that respondents felt this does not exist in the ex-Service charitable sector at present.

Pragmatically in discussion, **respondents identified there is a translation problem on both sides. Not necessarily just qualifications and skills, but 'equivalency' of experience. This was reported as being at every stage and as being 'not seen' in service. This is despite the fact that many respondents reported that their resettlement interventions "were about civilianising a CV", when in hindsight what they needed, was to be able to better understand their experience and skills and translate them into a civilian and commercial context.**

The value of the courses or training type interventions made available in transition were regularly commented upon. Their perceived

focus on the achievement of 'trade like' roles on discharge was cited observationally and many reported not having achieved anything of long-term value with their allocated resettlement or SLC or ELC funding allocation. Of all of the 'knowledge building' and 'employer exposure' type interventions on offer and available at points during transition and post discharge, those delivered in partnership with experts such as the Institute of Directors, Universities and Higher Education Institutions, and industry linked groups such as BuildForce/CiTB. were identified as the most impactful.

6.2.5 FINDING AND SECURING WORK

Digital literacy was identified as being at the heart of job-finding experiences.

- More than 68% of former Commissioned Officers reported having used LinkedIn compared to only 35% of former Other Ranks (ORs). There was also a notable corresponding reduction by rank grouping.

- Former Commissioned Officers were almost twice as likely to have used the services of a military charity compared to a former OR. Again, with a corresponding reduction by rank grouping.

- Former Commissioned Officers were also more likely to have used the services of a specialist military recruiter. A third of former Commissioned Officers used these services which is more than three times the number of former ORs doing likewise. Again, a proportionate correlation by rank grouping was clearly identifiable.

- 64% of former ORs utilised mainstream recruiters' websites compared with 47%

of former Commissioned Officers. Again, a proportionate correlation by rank grouping was clearly identifiable.

As has been illustrated, rank and seniority were identified as critical factors in identifying trends in this quantitative data. Usage of LinkedIn, the support of military charities, and the usage of specialist military recruiters were all significantly higher for former Commissioned Officers with a proportionate reduction by rank and seniority through former SNCOs, JNCOs and ORs. **In exploration, the connectedness and networks of former Commissioned Officers primarily as a result of both exposure and experience in service but also reflective of their pre-military social status, the relatively higher level of academic attainment (including a vast majority with university educations[54]), and the higher proportion of those with a public school education[55] are all important factors in defining and identifying the amount of social capital available to an individual.**

Equally important in building social capital for the SNCO rank grouping was the value of the in-service networks and the continuous cycle of transition of individuals (especially SNCOs at end of career) out of service and their informal advice and guidance to SNCO colleagues on transition. With reduction in rank, comes a lower level of opportunity to build such social capital and a relative 'closeness' of those individuals to their pre-military social status, standing and therefore reserves of social capital. These are all clear indicators of the value of social capital, both developed prior to service and during, and its impact on the achievement of successful outcomes at speed and that meet aspiration.

This is further reinforced by the situation that former ORs were significantly more likely to have trusted mainstream recruiters and their websites with their employment finding activities and outcomes with a corresponding reduction in reliance through former JNCO's, SNCOs and Commissioned

Officers. When exploring the individual experiences of commercial recruiters, they reported with consistency that *"they know where to point ex-Service personnel and how to successfully gain a fee (for placement)"*. This placement quite often did not necessarily reflect the aspiration on the part of the individual.

- Only 11% of respondents said they were not fully confident translating and communicating their skills from the military for a civilian audience.

When exploring the source of this reported confidence, rank and length of service appear determinants, with those with longer periods of service and higher rank and seniority more likely to answer positively (fully confident). It should be noted that an explicit type of 'communication' was not identified in the quantitative question when exploring this area. This 'communication' is therefore interpreted to be both in the written and spoken word. Interestingly, more than a third of SMEs reported an experience that reflects the anecdotal evidence of previous reports which suggests ex-Service CVs and applications are difficult to understand and don't consistently evidence the required skills and experience with strength and clarity. Conversely SMEs identified with consistency that ex-Service personnel when face to face and in interview, communicated their skills and experience with clarity and clear transferability. This combination and the staged process which requires a CV or application to gain an interview suggests that this reported 'confidence' on the part of ex-Service personnel while accurately borne out by employers' face to face experiences, is not borne out by success in the 'process' itself.

There was a consistent theme about CV development. That this was a journey of development and one which didn't really start in anger until the first application or real exposure to the world of finding and securing work. The length of time individuals felt it took to perfect a CV or suite of

---

54 Telegraph (2017) see https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/08/14/army-chief-reveals-plans-entice-school-leavers-sandhurst-offering/
55 BBC (2019) see https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48607943

CVs varied but was reported consistently as multiple months. The tailoring and specificity of CVs to specific roles and organisations was also explored, but this was a reality that hit in all cases post discharge and only as a result of failure or feedback. The role of the individuals' social network and of those who had gone before them was key in this development and learning. There was a heavy reliance on formal and informal mentors, the development and utilisation of which was the main time factor in achieving success.

It was widely felt that social networks and social capital speed up the learning. Those that have one, or developed one describe having moved faster as a result.

Ex-Service intermediaries and charities were identified as a route to building a network, but only with individual proactivity. Of all of the cited intermediaries or charities offering services in this space the Officers' Association was cited consistently as having a good reputation and a realistic and practical offering especially in the development of networks and social capital and providing exposure to employers, employees and their networks. A future solution should look to be additive to these presently analogue and in person services by layering on a digital offering.

Time was identified as a key factor and speeding up the time it took to generate social capital was discussed at length. In summary it was felt that it is the reliance on relationship building which takes the time. When exploring solutions there was a notable suggestion on how it can be navigated more quickly - not the provision of a `one stop shop', but a stop that knows where the shops are, how to access them, which ones are best and why - a co-ordinator/navigator.

With real and resounding consistency, the value of networking was identified as a critical factor in achieving a successful outcome. It was widely reported as being under-sold, under-valued, misunderstood and under-utilised until it hit home how important social capital and networks are. The research identified a number of routes to embedding this into a solution that delivered success, which included:

- The ability to seek and access expertise rapidly - those that have lived experience as mentors, coaches and guides.

- Understanding the value of a network and developing one sooner.

- Learning how to use the network you develop and where it is important.

- Understanding how to navigate and access pre-existing networks and other areas of support.

That the security of having a job provides the opportunity to explore and learn more quickly.

A number of individuals reported that their first job on discharge was proactively (rather than accidentally) about an exploration of the world of work and oneself and quite often provided them with more insight in a short period than had been able to be achieved through the resettlement and transition process. *"If you don't have a job, the priority is getting one, not learning. The opportunity to learn has not passed though. The network is still important, it's just a timing issue and remaining connected with help and support to guide development."*

It was felt that the pre-existing routes for advice and guidance in service, on transition and importantly post discharge, lacked experience, were broadly military or recently ex-military, and didn't have access to the right information. Specifically, it was reported that the advice and guidance available post discharge was patchy and difficult to navigate. It was widely reported that when reflecting on their own lived experience, the advice and guidance they received and was made available was of little realism and lacked value in application.

On a similar theme, **when exploring the support offered by organisations in this space, respondents reported knowledge of, and engagement with, a wide variety of actors who they felt offered "lots of the same thing". They felt there was little or no differentiation between service and offering and no readily identifiable data or insight on the relative levels of success. It was widely felt there was lots of support out there but it was difficult to navigate:**
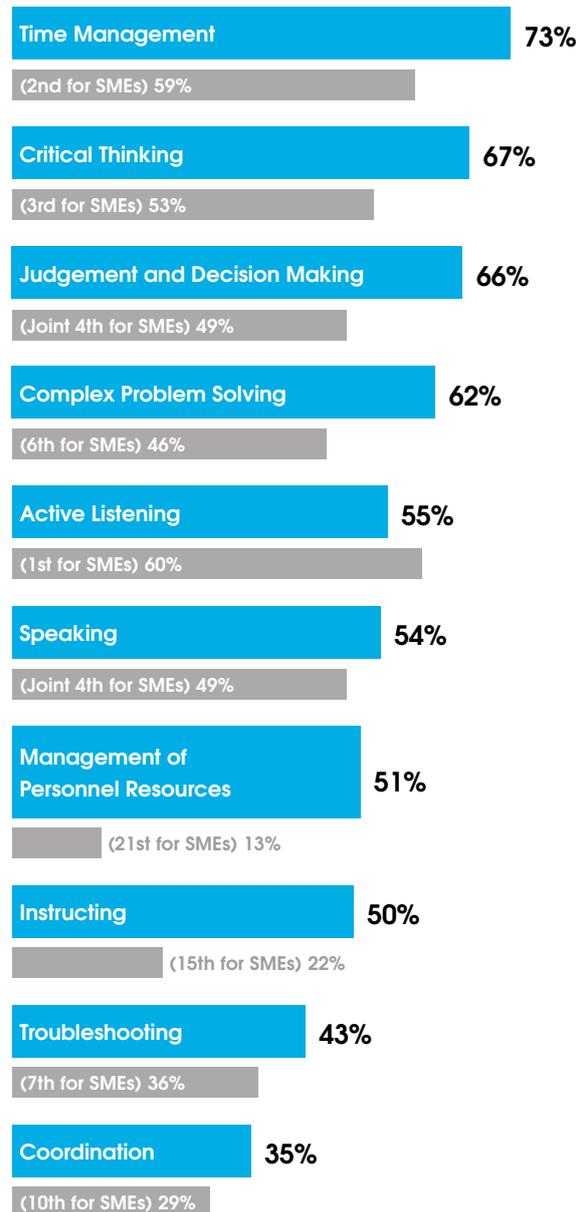
- **Who is it targeted at?**

- **Why does it exist?**

- **How will it help?**

- **Am I eligible?**

- **Is it local?/one near me?**

Navigating this was felt as an important part of the solution... a network of networks, a trusted source of navigation to others' services.

When exploring respondents experience of engagement with and feedback from and during the application process they felt that ex-Service personnel were consciously and subconsciously viewed as a risky option when compared to their civilian peers who had clear commercial and directly transferable experience. In opposition to the theme on the risk presented in comparison to their civilian counterparts, a majority of respondents assumed that employers viewed ex-Service personnel positively and shared a perception of what makes them valuable. In practice though it was also reported by a number that they felt their status as an ex-Service person led to their applications being dismissed based on a set of negative perceptions.

6.2.6　SKILLS

Respondents reported the top 10 skills (from the 34 top level skills in the O*NET skills taxonomy) they gained or improved as a result of their military service were:

Time Management **73%**
(2nd for SMEs) 59%

Critical Thinking **67%**
(3rd for SMEs) 53%

Judgement and Decision Making **66%**
(Joint 4th for SMEs) 49%

Complex Problem Solving **62%**
(6th for SMEs) 46%

Active Listening **55%**
(1st for SMEs) 60%

Speaking **54%**
(Joint 4th for SMEs) 49%

Management of Personnel Resources **51%**
(21st for SMEs) 13%

Instructing **50%**
(15th for SMEs) 22%

Troubleshooting **43%**
(7th for SMEs) 36%

Coordination **35%**
(10th for SMEs) 29%

The top ten general purpose skills identified as being gained or improved as a result of service corresponded heavily with those demanded by SMEs. The top 6 were identical but in differing orders. Critically it was universally reported that these skills were not explicitly communicated or evidenced in CVs or applications but assumed (by ex-Service personnel) as inherent and therefore part of the perception held by the recipient of such documents received from a readily identifiable ex-Service person. Not only does this identify a mis held belief about perceptions, but critically a lack of understanding of their own skills and how they were obtained as a result of experience and is suggested as being at the heart of the challenge. Understanding oneself adequately enough to be able to profile skills, behaviours and attitudes is difficult enough. Doing so and building evidential examples of so doing through experiences, and then matching and tailoring this transferrably to an employer with a key set of requirements and expectations is no mean feat. The lack of tools, services and an absence of a coherent and consistent solution to doing this identifies a critical gap in provision and one which needs to be addressed systemically if impact and improvement is to be made.

When further exploring the development of CVs, but primarily the building blocks of examples which evidence skills there was an identifiable educational gap. Exploring solutions to this challenge exposed a widely held opinion that when the 'mirror' (or a tool that performs said action) is held up, either by way of the exploration carried out in this type of enquiry, or a profiling tool (or suite of tools) identifying what really are their skills, the reality is clear and therefore the connection made to what they really do have to offer. Immediately identifiable examples of discussed generic skills were present and offered by all respondents, further evidencing the value of better self-discovery and understanding.

Almost

56%

of respondents said that they did not think employers fully understand the skills they could bring from military service.

When exploring what respondents perceived about the skills, behaviours and attitudes they had gained from service, and importantly those they perceived were generally understood by employers and the wider population they identified:

- Discipline of self

- Self-confidence

- Health and positive work ethic

- Obedience (ability to take direction and follow instructions)

- Problem solving

- Timekeeping (and working to tight deadlines and under pressure)

- Leadership

- Common sense

- Well presented

- Teamwork/team player

- Process and procedure driven

- Self-deprecating

- Communication

- Presentations

- Speaking

- Multilevel (social ranging)

- Honest and plain speaking

- Selling - relationship management - influencing

It was felt that this set of skills, attitudes and behaviours was generically inherent in all ex-Service personnel with a minimum of 2 years FT service post phase 2 training. *"For me these skills are the baseline of military experience, we all have them."* However, it was felt that while this also applied to Commissioned Officers, it was limited to the point at which these individuals have completed their last command appointment.

It was unanimously identified and reported that these skills, behaviours and attitudes (or examples of such experience where they manifested) were not and had not been included explicitly in their CVs or applications for work at any point. It was again unanimously reported that respondents had assumed these were 'a given' for ex-Service personnel and employers and the wider population already knew these things and not only held this perception but believed it as the truth. The clear mismatch in perceptional understanding of ex-Service personnel and their expectations, coupled with the mismatch in meeting their 'supply' (value-based skills and experience offering) with the 'demand' (employer risk mitigation) appear critical in written documents. When employers have the opportunity to be explicit in their demands, clarify their enquiry, and explore the responses as in a face to face setting, the outcomes of supply meeting demand are much better aligned.

Interestingly given the assumed perception identified, there was also a recognition of a diametrically opposed (and reported as media driven) negative perception (held by some employers) of ex-Service personnel, especially the risk they present culturally and in practice. Again, when explored this negative perception had not been evidentially countered in CVs or application documents by ex-Service personnel respondents. It was reported that the potential of this negative perception was partly the reason for under-playing military examples and therefore a double-edged sword when combined with the previous observation on selling their skills and experiences.

When triangulated with the remainder of the research it is suggested therefore that the confidence reported in translating and communicating the skills gained in service for a civilian audience does not correlate necessarily with ability or capability. This confidence is suggested as a perceptional confidence which is in opposition to the efficacy or impact of it. Again, knowledge is key to improving ability and capability which aligns with the levels of confidence. Developing this in a similar way to the knowledge development already identified (networked social capital development through connectedness with those lived experience as a result of managed intervention) is critical to future solutions.

6.2.7 EMPLOYERS

42%

of respondents were not confident at identifying employers who had committed to or signed the AFC or ERS.

20%

of respondents felt that employers who had signed the AFC or were members of the ERS still did not understand the value ex-Service personnel could bring to their organisation.

This is a significant opportunity lost. The readiness and willingness of such organisations to engage proactively and with equity (and in a lot of cases advantage) with the service and ex-Service community is not being fully capitalised upon. Providing these employers with a consistent and coherent route to access, engage and understand the talent that exists alongside routes to demonstrably measure and report on this activity have the potential not only to benefit the ex-Service community and employers themselves, but the wider MoD. Any future solution should look to seize and capitalise on this opportunity and ensure it enables such organisations to realise their commitments in this space.

Respondents reported that their experience of employers who had signed the AFC and were committed to the ERS was of "*commitment at the most senior level which doesn't always translate into action".* Interestingly this was borne out both by their experiences of finding and securing work and once in employment - many of the respondents worked for organisations who had made such commitments and at relatively senior levels.

6.2.8 FUTURE SOLUTIONS

When discussing potential future solutions, it was felt that an 'ecosystem' that not only matched to opportunities and advertised them, but enabled feedback and rating was valuable to making decisions about the value and importance of an intervention or opportunity. That these opportunities coupled with the

ability to access mentors and guidance from others provided the opportunity to 'triangulate' insight without being wholly reliant on one employer or publicly available sources. And that this could be wider than employers and employees offering opportunities but also for individuals to provide lived experience advice and guidance in their own right

The nature of in-service learning and development was consistently cited as the preferred and most impactful pedagogy. Learning from those with more experience, from your peers, and from those who had gone before (as opposed to experts or external sources) was identified as critical to success. The role of formal and informal mentors was well evidenced. "*We have all worked our way up from somewhere. We are used to learning from others who have done things before".*

It was therefore asserted that future solutions should seek to:

- enable the development of knowledge and insight through the managed and facilitated development of social capital,

- connect people with a trusted and lived experience, leveraging existing networks and routes to their development,

- connect people with employer driven opportunities that expose them to the world of work and develop knowledge that manages expectations and informs a plan,

- alongside the opportunity of self-discovery through profiling of experience and building a transferrable and utilisable suite of skills and importantly evidence of them,

- which drives understanding by employers, and

- the best possible person-job match that realises aspiration.

6.3   Spouses/Partners of Ex-Service Personnel

6.3.1   INTRODUCTION

We received 23 individual online quantitative survey responses (the survey questions, visual presentations of the full results and the full data sets are available at www.goodpeople.co.uk/fimt-research) from the spouses/partners of ex-Service personnel who lived within a commutable distance of the Solent. These were generated as a result of:

- engagement through Facebook groups targeted at the spouses and partners of ex-Service personnel,

- engagement with service charities such as the Naval Families Federation (NFF) and wider charitable and not-profit actors in the local area,

- engagement with individuals of note and with networks and circles of service spouses and partners, and

- encouraging our ex-Service personnel respondents to share our survey for completion with their spouse/partner.

The online survey asked questions which focused in 4 key areas (Employment, Finding and Securing Work, Skills, and Employers) in addition to capturing demographic data to enable segmentation and exploration of the results.

We completed 6 interviews by telephone (the interview questions and the thematic findings of these interviews are available at www.goodpeople. co.uk/fimt-research) with individual respondents to the online survey who had provided their contact details for this purpose. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes each and explored areas identified for further research and focus as a result of the online survey data collected.

This primary data has been examined as a whole and thematically. Segmentation by demographic data fields to further explore the factors at play in each area was not considered appropriate due to the relatively small sample size. It has therefore not been possible to draw meaningful conclusions in comparison with the expected norms or wider national, regional or cohort specific data sets.

6.3.2   DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Scale and volume engagement with this cohort proved a challenge when compared to that of ex-Service personnel. **Continued self-identification of a specific 'status' (service spouse/partner or even ex-Service spouse/ partner) appears limited once the individuals' spouse/partner has left service.** Reportedly there are few reasons to continue to identify such 'status' or to embrace being an 'ex'-service persons spouse or partner, based on the perceived lack of support or service available as a result of such self-identification. Therefore, it appears that there is also a limited appetite to engage in research focused on the development of solutions targeted at individuals with such a shared 'status'.

In terms of our respondents:

- They were split equally between spouses/ partners of former Royal Navy and Army personnel with one respondents' spouse/ partner having served in the RAF.

- 61% of their spouses/partners had served more than 16 years.

- 43% were the spouses/partners of former Commissioned Officers with a further 26% the spouses/partners of former SNCOs.

- 70% of the respondent's spouses/partners had left the services less than 8 years ago.

- 78% of them were aged between 35 and 54. With 22 of the 23 respondents identifying as white.

Disconnecting the wider 'life' and situational challenges and experiences from those explicitly posed and created as a result of their spouses/ partners military service is remarkably difficult. The challenges faced by civilian families in managing childcare, full time work and other everyday demands can quite often be similar to those of military families. It was identified that, for most, the period of military service aligned heavily with the start of relationships, marriage, and ultimately children and the development of family. It is therefore asserted that spouses/ partners of ex-Service personnel and broadly of those of serving personnel (with a number of notable exceptions explored later) are equitable with those experiencing a similar social disadvantage but without the outside influences of the military. As such, employment service solutions focused and proven at overcoming the social disadvantage of similar groups would potentially appear to be situationally successful with this cohort.

6.3.3   EMPLOYMENT

Meaningful and material comparisons and observations against expected norms or wider national, regional or cohort specific data sets were not possible due to the limited sample size. However the respondents broadly reported what appear to be favourable experiences of employment.

- 56% of respondents were in work, with 13% not in paid employment and seeking work.

- 83% of respondents reported their employment fully utilises their skills and experience.

- 75% of respondents reported that their employment provides pay and seniority that reflects their skills and experience.

- 41% of respondents reported that their employer offers promotion and development opportunities that reflect their skills and experiences.

- 75% of respondents reported their employment fully met their aspirations.

Self-employment was identified as a key factor in realising continuity of employment despite location change, and in delivering a level of 'own' flexibility for other responsibilities and challenges such as childcare. Support to achieve and realise ambitions of self-employment would appear to be impactful activity given this type of employments' reported alignment with both achieving employment aspirations and overcoming the specific situational challenges posed by service life.

Employed roles in the public sector, especially in the NHS, or central government departments and local authorities, appear to provide and allow for a level of flexibility and understanding not widely present in the private sector. Understanding the conditions and situational opportunities of public sector employers may identify learning and best practice with transferability. It may also prove a much more successful route for engagement with, and ultimately employment of, service spouses/partners if targeted appropriately.

It was widely reported that service events especially those 'inside the wire, or 'on the patch' and organised by service welfare and families charities were heavily focused on spouses/ partners who were not in work and centred around children and caring for them. An implicit disconnection seems to exist between those spouses/partners who worked (especially full time) and the service family community. It is suggested that the primary reason for this is that the level of independence generated by these individuals means they rely less heavily on the service community for pastoral support.

6.3.4   FINDING AND SECURING WORK

It was reported by all respondents that they were not aware of any support available to them as a spouse/partner either while in service, on transition, or on leaving the services to prepare

for, find, secure or sustain work. Of note were the mentions of lacking provision or support for those with childcare or caring responsibilities even though this is a clear demand of the cohort and a key barrier to securing and sustaining work.

- Almost 80% of respondents reported they had used online jobs boards for finding and securing work. With 57% having utilised LinkedIn. Only 1 respondent had engaged the services of a military charity.

- 81% of respondents reported they were confident in building a CV and using online marketing and recruitment tools to communicate their skills.

38%

of respondents reported feeling that their career and employment prospects had been negatively affected as a result of their spouse/ partners military service.

- Of those, 3 reported this impact as moderate (on a scale of insignificant - minor - moderate - major - severe) 5 reported the impact as major.

The continuous and regular cycle of postings and moves was reported as having had a detrimental impact on the social life, social circle and the longevity of social networks developed by the respondents. Conversely, **the support identified as most valuable both in transition and on leaving the services for both the serving individual and their spouse/partner was the network they had built of individuals who had 'gone before them'. They relied heavily on the advice, guidance and support of those with 'lived experience'. Social networks and therefore social capital were identified as**
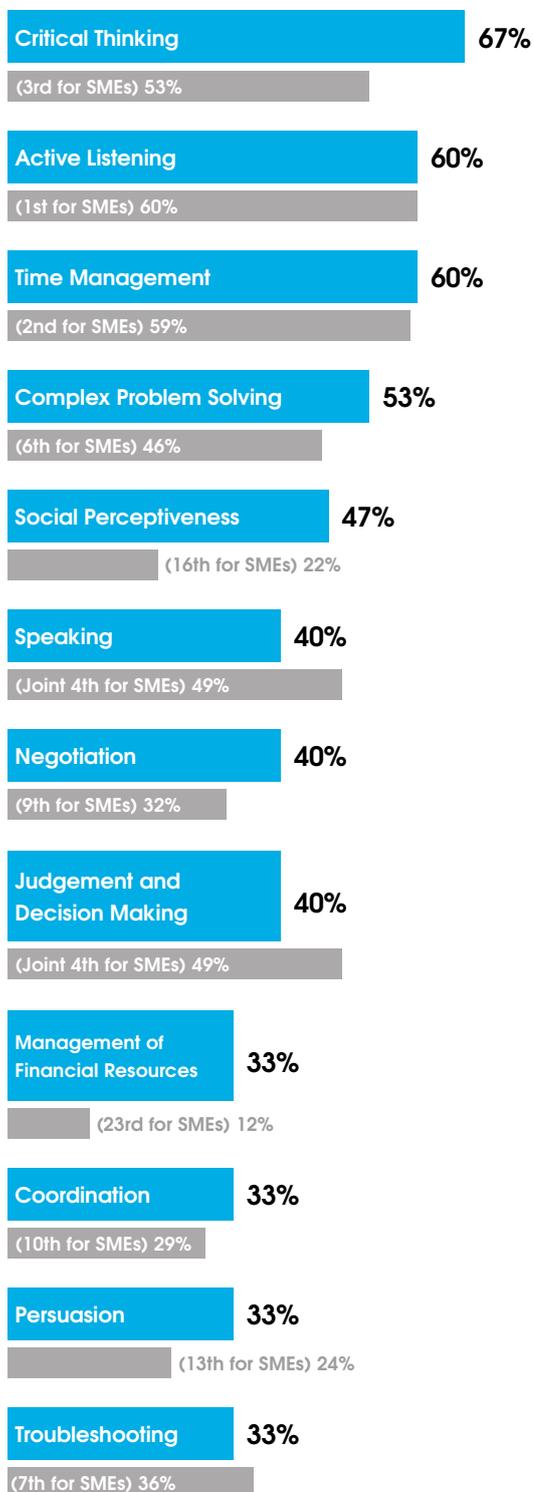
critically important in enabling a successful transition and civilian life after service. They were also identified as critical to spouses/ partners when moving as a result of posting. and seeking to find and secure new work. Building, curating and utilising these networks from place to place and setting to setting is important to overcoming disadvantage and driving equity and advantage. Exploring solutions to so doing both for the serving and ex-serving community of spouses/ partners appears a sensible next step.

The services and support available to both serving and ex-serving individuals' spouses/ partners is either not widely understood or marketed, or, not available to meet the situational demands. Given the well understood specificity of the challenges faced by serving spouses/partners in finding and securing work, the social and network effects, and the quite often challenging childcare demands, it appears specific solutions are identifiable and deliverable.

6.3.5   SKILLS

Importantly, more than two thirds (71%) of respondents believed they had gained valuable skills they might otherwise not have obtained as a result of their experiences as a service spouse/partner. This is critically important in differentiating them from the remainder of the labour force and an advantage they should capitalise on. Readily evidencing these skills through experiences understood by employers and importantly embraced by them is a route to ensuring equity and advantage.

The top ten reported skills (from the 34 top level skills in the O*NET skills taxonomy) they had obtained were:

Critical Thinking — 67%
(3rd for SMEs) 53%

Active Listening — 60%
(1st for SMEs) 60%

Time Management — 60%
(2nd for SMEs) 59%

Complex Problem Solving — 53%
(6th for SMEs) 46%

Social Perceptiveness — 47%
(16th for SMEs) 22%

Speaking — 40%
(Joint 4th for SMEs) 49%

Negotiation — 40%
(9th for SMEs) 32%

Judgement and Decision Making — 40%
(Joint 4th for SMEs) 49%

Management of Financial Resources — 33%
(23rd for SMEs) 12%

Coordination — 33%
(10th for SMEs) 29%

Persuasion — 33%
(13th for SMEs) 24%

Troubleshooting — 33%
(7th for SMEs) 36%

The top 3 reported skills gained as a result of their experience correlated with the top 3 demanded by SME respondents. Knowledge of this situation alone - 'what do employers really want?' -

should allow a focus and tailoring of skills and experience through traditional routes (such as CVs and application forms), but also potentially a journey to the development of a 'service spouse/partner' skillset or description that populates and supports the development of profiles and aids skills and experience matching as part of a future solution. In the short-term utilising this knowledge seems achievable when considering that 80% of respondents reported that they were confident in translating and communicating these skills they had gained to a civilian audience.

EMPLOYERS

While ERS committed employers were of mention, most reported that in their experience employers who had already hired and employed the spouses/partners of service personnel were the most committed to doing so again. Mainly as a result of their positive experience, or the commitment of those individuals already engaged in the process.

- 57% of respondents reported feeling that employers did not fully understand the value spouses/partners of service and ex-Service personnel can bring to their organisations and the skills they bring as a result of their experiences.

- 57% of respondents reported that they could not confidently identify an employer who has made a commitment to the AFC or ERS.

Not only did the majority of respondents report an inability to identify AFC and ERS committed employers, but a third felt those who had made these commitments still didn't understand their value.

Generating understanding and engagement in the serving and ex-Service cohort of spouses/partners appears important to overcoming these challenges both for the MoD (DRM) with employer partners but also with the service and ex-Service communities.