



DOING OUR DUTY?

Improving transitions for military leavers

April 2014



THE CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

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About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) aims to put social justice at the heart of British politics.

Our policy development is rooted in the wisdom of those working to tackle Britain's deepest social problems and the experience of those whose lives have been affected by poverty. Our Working Groups are non-partisan, comprising prominent academics, practitioners and policy makers who have expertise in the relevant fields. We consult nationally and internationally, especially with charities and social enterprises, who are the champions of the welfare society.

In addition to policy development, the CSJ has built an alliance of poverty fighting organisations that reverse social breakdown and transform communities.

We believe that the surest way the Government can reverse social breakdown and poverty is to enable such individuals, communities and voluntary groups to help themselves.

The CSJ was founded by Iain Duncan Smith in 2004, as the fulfilment of a promise made to Janice Dobbie, whose son had recently died from a drug overdose just after he was released from prison.

Director: Christian Guy

Doing Our Duty? Improving transitions for military leavers

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Preface

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) searches for solutions to some of Britain's toughest social problems. In partnership with our Alliance of 300 poverty-fighting charities, we seek to bring the reality of deprivation to the political square and to speak up for those who need another chance. And in our ten year history we have seen regularly the over-representation of ex-service personnel in disadvantage.

As we know the British armed forces offer remarkable opportunities for those who serve. We also know that the vast majority of people who leave the military settle quickly back into civilian life, finding new roles building on their skills and experience or enjoying retirement.

Yet as this report shows, despite the best intentions of the Armed Forces Covenant, too many people who have risked everything for our country end up trapped in unemployment and poverty, facing nights on the streets or friends' sofas. A worrying number develop major addiction problems and suffer from poor mental health. Others drift into crime and our prison system. More complex still is the fact that many young infantry recruits, for example, have experienced considerable social disadvantage *before* joining, which makes transitional help all the more important.

We use this report to try to understand the size of the challenges facing those transitioning between service and 'civvy street', the weaknesses of the systems in place to help those who encounter difficulty and we attempt to outline how things can improve. Some of these recommendations are about new leadership, such as through a necessary Veterans' Ombudsman, whilst others changes are designed to enable agencies to become more effective, for example through sharing data and amending the military qualifying rules for transition guidance. Whether minor tweak or major reform, what we call for in this paper could make a significant difference to many lives.

What has become abundantly clear from our research is that without effective transitional support far too many vulnerable service leavers simply disappear. Left alone to deal with difficult backgrounds and the unimaginable experiences of conflict, they can re-emerge at crisis point with their lives in tatters.

I hope all political parties take this report seriously. Help for people planning life after serving in the Armed Forces has to be more than a luxury or a reward for loyalty. We all pay the price for the way the current arrangements can fall short. So, in response, it is time to bring the Armed Forces Covenant to life for the most vulnerable. This is not about charity, pity or victimisation. It is actually about what they deserve. It is about doing *our* duty.

Christian Guy

Director, Centre for Social Justice

Members of the CSJ Military Leavers Working Group



Sir Mark Mans

Lieutenant General Sir Mark Mans retired from the Army in 2012 having held a number of high-level appointments including that of Adjutant General and Army Board member. He now holds non-executive positions with Capita PLC and Allocate Software plc, and is also a Member and past Director of the Armed Forces Charities Advisory Company, a Patron to both the Defence Medical Welfare Service and the Ulysses Trust, and a Trustee of the Nuffield Trust.



Sir Simon Wessely

Sir Simon Wessely is Professor and Head of the Department of Psychological Medicine and Vice Dean for Academic Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP), King's College London. From 2014 he will be President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Simon is best known for his work on unexplained symptoms, syndromes and military health.

Born and educated in Sheffield, he studied medical sciences and history of art at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, and then finished his medical training at University College Oxford, graduating in 1981.

He founded the King's Centre for Military Health Research, a unique collaboration between the IoP and the KCL Department of War Studies in 2003. Its flagship project, a large-scale ongoing study of the health and wellbeing of the UK Armed Forces, has had a direct impact on public policy and on forms of treatment and help for Service personnel. Other major studies include long term work on Gulf War related illness, randomised controlled trials of different forms of stress management for military personnel, studies of mental health screening including the first ever RCT of post deployment screening, long term outcomes of deployment in reservists, in theatre research on cohesion, stress, breakdown and morale, unique record linkage studies of

criminal behaviour and offending, an early look at decompression, new work on civil/military relationships and public opinion using the British Social Attitude Survey, a series of historical works on war and psychiatry, and the largest ever study on military families.



John Clokey

John is the Defence Director of Capita Group and is primarily engaged as a member of The British Army Recruiting Group Joint Strategy Board as part of Capita and the British Army's 10 year Recruiting Partnering Programme. John is also a member of the MOD Defence Career Partnership Steering Group and also a Selected Member of the London Reserve Forces and Cadets Association.

Previously John has enjoyed a successful business career at senior level with several FTSE 100 companies and served for 10 years in the Royal Navy. He was also at one time a Registered Samaritan and has supported the work of several Military and Service Charities.

In his spare time John is currently a Serving Officer in the Royal Navy Reserves and Chairman of an Estate Management Company.



Dan Martin

Dan Martin is a Senior Policy Adviser at the Royal British Legion and has worked in the Legion's Public Affairs and Public Policy team since 2007. The teams' work has been instrumental in raising awareness of the concept of the Armed Forces Covenant and delivering many significant improvements in provision for the UK's Armed Forces community. Dan has responsibility for developing the organisations public policy position, and commissioning research, on a range of Armed Forces and veteran related subjects including housing, military compensation, immigration, employment, welfare benefits and offending.

Prior to joining the Legion he held both policy and legal advocacy roles with the housing charity Shelter.



Trevor Philpott

Trevor Philpott OBE served for 34 years in the Royal Marines. Having undertaken various operational, staff and training appointments in the UK and abroad, he retired in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In 2000 he established C-FAR, a charitable training company that helped to rehabilitate young adult persistent male offenders. The project included residential programmes of personal development, academic, social and life skills training and intensive mentoring.

Following success in that work, with colleagues he established 'Life Change Initiative', helping other professionals to work with hard-to-reach groups and challenging behaviour.

A former member of the CSJ's Prison Reform Group, more recently he has been involved in the development of the Veterans Change Partnership aimed at rehabilitating military veteran offenders.

Trevor is an Associate Trainer for Learning South West and a Fellow of the RSA.



Russ Pierre

Russ is the Business and Employment Director at Surf Action in Cornwall.

Russ Pierre has a military family history including a great uncle who fell at Vimy Ridge and a father who served with Air Sea Rescue during WW2, and worked alongside the British Army as a policeman during the EOKA guerrilla campaign in Cyprus.

Russ joined Surf Action three years ago having spent 13 years as a teacher of further education and during this time developed a range of managerial skills and a passionate interest in surf photography. He feels that Surf Action allows him to use his passion for surfing to help others whilst creating awareness of an innovative and exciting charity.



Dr Peter Johnston, author and researcher

Peter is the lead researcher for the military transitions project at the CSJ. After completing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at Durham University he completed his doctorate in History in 2013 at the University of Kent, where he specialised in British professional military culture and military veterans.

Prior to joining the CSJ, he previously worked as a freelance researcher for authors, museums, and television production companies. He also worked in higher education, having been a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Westminster and an Assistant Lecturer at the University of Kent during his studies.

Acknowledgments

The CSJ would like to thank the many people and numerous charities and services, along with NHS England and the Ministry of Defence, that have given their time, expertise and advice to contribute evidence during this research.

Our thanks also go to the Working Group for their commitment and belief in this project.

The wider CSJ team led by Alex Burghart, Director of Policy, have provided support, advice and technical knowledge throughout this process that were greatly appreciated.

Finally, we would like to give special mention and thanks to the many veterans who shared their experiences with us. Their insight into the circumstances faced by those leaving the Armed Forces has been invaluable.

Foreword

By Lieutenant General Sir Mark Mans KCB CBE DL

At a time when much has been researched and written about transition from military to civilian life and associated veterans' issues, some may question what another study will achieve. This research study rightly focuses on employment and mental health, but uniquely also makes recommendations to help prevent ex-servicemen and women falling victim to the more prevalent social ills of homelessness, addiction and crime. In all of this, the mere fact that there is considerable and growing evidence from a variety of sources, indicating improvements must be made, is proof enough that the time to act is overdue.

Over the past three years the outflow from the Regular Armed Forces has exceeded 21,000; fuelled by continuing Army redundancies. Although the majority of servicemen and women successfully leave the Armed Forces and lead fulfilling lives, the lost benefits to society and the cost to the taxpayer of failed transition are nonetheless significant – in excess of £100 million. The values, work ethic and leadership and management skills that ex-servicemen and women bring to society and the workplace are well recognised. These talents are not only confined to ex-Regulars; those who serve as Reservists are of equal value to their employers. But insufficient support is currently given to service leavers most in need, particularly those who only serve for a few years. They are the most vulnerable and deserve significantly improved support to ensure they do not become destitute.

It is also necessary to bring real meaning to the Armed Forces Covenant some three years after its publication. Implementation of the recommendations emanating from this study will provide just such an opportunity. However, enabling a smooth and successful transition from the Armed Forces is not solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence. Other government departments have a most important part to play and it is through properly coordinated activity that the necessary outcomes for ex-servicemen and women will be achieved. But, this will only be made possible by the appointment of a Veterans Ombudsman.

It has been a privilege to have been involved in this important study and I commend it to all who are committed to bettering the lives of those who serve and have served in the Armed Forces.

**Lieutenant General Sir Mark Mans, former Adjutant General and member of the Army Board,
February 2014**

Executive summary

This report examines how and why the lives of some service personnel fall apart on leaving the British Armed Forces, asks how they can be rebuilt and presents solutions to prevent these personal tragedies.

On average over the previous six years, an average of more than 20,000 personnel have left the UK Armed Forces each year.¹ For some, transition is a difficult and complicated process. As a result:

- Unemployment amongst ex-Service personnel aged 18–49 is twice the national average;²
- A range of studies have suggested that former members of the Armed Forces account for between 3.5 and 10 per cent of the prison population;³
- Estimates suggest that as many as six per cent of the current UK homeless population could be ex-Armed Forces;⁴
- Problematic alcohol consumption disproportionately impacts veterans and their families.⁵ This is a continuation of patterns of behaviour established whilst in uniform, where 67 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women in the British Armed Forces engage in hazardous drinking. These rates are far higher than those found in their civilian counterparts – 38 and 16 per cent for men and women respectively;⁶
- Male soldiers under 30 are three times more likely to be convicted of violent offences, and those who have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan are more than twice as likely to commit a violent offence than those in non-frontline roles. These are sobering statistics after more than a decade of war;⁷
- Typically servicemen seeking help from Combat Stress have been through the break-up of at least one marriage.⁸

1 Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA), *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

2 Royal British Legion, *Profile and Needs of the Ex-Service Community, 2005–2020*, London: RBL, 2006, p2

3 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010, and James Treadwell, *Ex-Soldiers in Prison*, University of Leicester Department of Criminology [accessed via <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/research/current-projects/jt146soldiers> 02/08/13]]

4 Riverside Edge, *Homelessness within ex-Armed Forces Personnel*, Liverpool: Riverside Edge, 2011

5 Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

6 Ibid

7 MacManus, D et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

8 Busuttil, W, *Veterans Services in the UK: The Role of Combat Stress*, London: Combat Stress, 2011

Many of these issues are rooted in the disadvantage some recruits face before they enter service; research suggests that of the non-officer personnel in the military, 69 per cent were found to have come from a broken home; 50 per cent were classified as coming from a deprived background; and 16 per cent had been long-term unemployed before joining.⁹ More than a third of Early Service Leavers (ESLs) – those who leave having served less than four years – have endured the highest levels of childhood adversity.¹⁰ This disadvantage is often sheltered whilst in the military, but military careers are finite. In 2009/10, 60 per cent of those leaving the UK Armed Forces had served six years or less.¹¹ The problems and consequences of such disadvantage can therefore lie dormant until after the service leaver is discharged from the Armed Forces.

This report is based around five key issues that confront some service leavers, and it explores the barriers that exist to their successful re-integration at their point of discharge, and examines the consequences of failing to overcome them.

They are:

- Employment
- Housing and Homelessness
- Alcohol and Drug Use
- Mental Health
- Crime

Negative outcomes in these areas are a terrible reality for some current and future service leavers. This report will tackle why and how this is the case, identify where they are most common in the Armed Forces, and make recommendations on how they can be avoided.

Chapter 1: Employment

‘When you join up, you don’t think about what you’re going to do after. You think you’ll be there for life. Then when you do get out, you think you’ll just leave and get a job, but it’s not that easy. You end up sitting around, twiddling your thumbs. What are you going to put on your CV? “Two tours in Afghanistan.” That doesn’t mean anything to civilians.’

Johnno, former soldier, in evidence to the CSJ

9 House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *Analysis of Socio-Economic Backgrounds of non-Officer Recruits: Written Evidence*, London: House of Commons, 2005

10 Buckman J et al, ‘Early Service Leavers: A study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early’, *European Journal of Public Health*, 23, 2013, pp410–415

11 Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP), the current providers of transition services to the MoD, estimate that the overall annual employment rate amongst service leavers who have used the service since 2009/10 to be 85 per cent.¹² The most recently available figures show that within six months of leaving the Armed Forces nine per cent of the 3,650 UK Regulars who used the CTP resettlement services in 2012/13 were unemployed.¹³

Since 2011 the military has embarked upon a process of downsizing, including substantial redundancies, which will see the loss of 33,000 jobs. For those being made redundant, the situation appears to be getting worse. The unemployment rate rose to 8 per cent for those in the second phase of redundancies in 2012, up from 3 per cent for those made unemployed in the first round in 2011.¹⁴

Many service personnel lack the basic skills which are required for much post-military employment. 80 per cent of new recruits to the Army between July 2012 and June 2013 possessed the reading age of a 14-year-old or below.¹⁵ It is a problem that also affects the serving military; 39 per cent of serving members of the Army have the literacy of an 11-year-old.¹⁶ It is estimated that around 20,000 soldiers may have left the Army in the four years between September 2009 and September 2013 without basic functioning skills.¹⁷ A generation of service leavers is therefore at risk of struggling in their post-military lives.

Other barriers include the cultural divide that prevents accurate skill translation and an inability to equate or utilise qualifications gained in the military with those required by civilian employers. There are also problems of perception. 91 per cent of the public think that it is quite or very common that those who have served in the Armed Forces will have some kind of physical, emotional, or mental health problem as a result of their service – a damaging assumption for civilian employers to hold.¹⁸

Chapter 2: Housing

Currently, the main focus of transition services is post-military employment, with housing a distant second.

The CSJ has learned that a particularly vulnerable group of military service leavers – those who have served for shorter periods of time and came from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds – are disproportionately disadvantaged when it comes to

¹² DASA, *Career Transition Partnership quarterly statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, Q1 2009/10 to Q2 2012/13*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 [accessed via http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/health/veterans/career-transition-partnership/financial-year-2012-13-q2/2009_10-to-2012_13-q2.pdf (12/12/13)]

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid. Unemployment rates were higher amongst those who did not apply for redundancy, and the employment rate remained constant for the two groups.

¹⁵ Freedom of Information Reply 04-11-2013-135613-020, Ministry of Defence, 26 November 2013

¹⁶ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, 2013

¹⁷ DASA, *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Personnel Report 1 October 2013*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013. Data for 2012/13 compiled from estimates based on six-month data collected up to September 2013

¹⁸ Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

securing accommodation after their service careers. Their behaviour following discharge, of simply staying with friends or relatives, also has the potential to increase instability.

Many service leavers rely on the provision of the Armed Forces Covenant when they leave the military, which grants them special dispensation when applying for social housing. It states that: 'Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to social housing and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged in that respect by the requirement for mobility whilst in Service.'¹⁹ In theory, therefore, service leavers are able to circumnavigate the requirement to have a local connection when applying for social housing that would otherwise exclude them, giving them a greater freedom in their choice of where to live. However, extensive waiting lists, and a failure to ascertain an individual's service history prevent many from achieving this.

Housing for service leavers is a neglected aspect of transition. Insufficient attention is paid during the transition process to where a service leaver is going to live after discharge; it is too often assumed by the military hierarchy that they will find somewhere. In addition, the CSJ has learned from charities that there is a real lack of understanding about the housing process amongst service leavers. Too many service leavers, when faced with transition, assume that they will simply be given a council house by the local authority of the area they choose to move to on the day of their discharge. This assumption is both false and harmful. With five million people on social housing waiting lists in England alone,²⁰ there is a major shortage that means, no matter how much veterans are prioritised, they will not get a property immediately after they leave.

Sadly, many service leavers can end up homeless as a consequence. Dr Hugh Milroy, CEO of the charity Veterans Aid, told the CSJ that in his experience around one in 30 homeless people in the UK served in the British Armed Forces.

'The thought of being on the streets... I've been in warzones, but that's easy in comparison. If I didn't find this place [SPACES in Catterick], I'd be on the streets. It's a scary place to be.'

Dave, former soldier, in evidence to the CSJ

Homelessness in former Armed Forces personnel is bound up in several complex and interlocking problems. Issues such as financial difficulties, alcohol abuse, mental ill-health, and family breakdown all contribute to homelessness as well as being consequences of it. For example, the Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness found that the homeless who had previously served in the Armed Forces were more likely to misuse alcohol than those who had not.²¹ The presence of such issues makes re-housing these individuals and turning their lives around when they present to charities such as Veteran's Aid in London or SPACES in Catterick a far more difficult task.

¹⁹ Ministry of Defence, *The Armed Forces Covenant*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2011

²⁰ Speech by Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, CIH Housing Conference, 13 June 2012

²¹ Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness, *Statement on the outcomes of the research project "The experiences of homeless ex-service personnel in London"*, York: Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness, 2008

Chapter 3: Alcohol and drug use

Issues surrounding alcohol and drug abuse disproportionately impact veterans and their families.²² Within this, it is alcohol that creates the most significant problems.

Many members of the Armed Forces, serving and former, have a problematic relationship with alcohol:

*'Although alcohol has always played a significant role in military life, the harm caused by heavy and sustained consumption is now well known. Excessive alcohol use may mask existing mental health problems, lead to dependence and is associated with violence and criminal activity.'*²³

Research published in 2007 found levels of alcohol consumption that are hazardous to physical and mental health amongst 67 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women in the British Armed Forces, far higher rates than those found in their civilian counterparts of 38 and 16 per cent for men and women respectively.²⁴

'When I joined up, I ended up with a battalion known for heavy drinking. To get in with my battalion, I had to go out drinking. That was the only way I was going to fit in. You drink to get by, to get along.'

Rob, former soldier, in evidence to the CSJ

In contrast, in 2012, random drug tests suggested that less than 1 per cent of the Armed Forces used illegal drugs.²⁵ This compares with 8.2 per cent of the adult population of England and Wales that have used illegal drugs other than alcohol in the past year.²⁶

A 2010 investigation of UK troops deployed to Afghanistan and/or Iraq found that military personnel were also more likely to report alcohol misuse after deployment than their colleagues who had not been deployed.²⁷ Alcohol misuse was greatest amongst those who had been deployed in a combat role, and had been at greatest risk of being killed or injured. 22.5 per cent of regular personnel who had been deployed in such roles reported alcohol misuse, versus 10.9 per cent of those who had not been deployed – more than double.²⁸

22 Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

23 Fossey M, *Across the Wire: Veterans, Mental Health and Vulnerability*, London: Centre for Mental Health, 2010

24 Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

25 Freedom of Information Reply FOI FOI-15-04-2013-120903-009, Ministry of Defence, 14 May 2013 [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199938/20130514_FOI_04_2013_120903_009_CDT.pdf (18/12/13)]

26 Home Office, *Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2012 to 2013 Crime Survey for England and Wales*, London: Home Office, 2013

27 Fear N et al, 'What are the Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces? A Cohort Study', *Lancet*, Vol. 375, 2010, pp1783 – 1797

28 Ibid

Service personnel under the age of 25 who had been deployed were also the dominant group in presenting with alcohol misuse issues, with a 2010 study finding that 26 per cent engaged in harmful drinking as compared to an average of 11 per cent across all older age groups.²⁹ It is this group that the CSJ has identified as being more vulnerable to suffering challenges in transition.

Charities have reported the strong link between alcohol misuse and abuse and subsequent negative social, physical and psychological issues. A survey of those former members of the Armed Forces personnel in contact with Combat Stress found that 20 per cent were drinking at a hazardous level and 27 per cent were considered to be alcohol dependent.³⁰ Similarly, Surf Action, a charity who works with veterans, told the CSJ that, as of October 2013, 100 per cent of their client base had issues with alcohol of varying severity.

Chapter 4: Mental health

Mental ill-health can be a major barrier to successful transition, and the current lack of effective care exacerbates already debilitating conditions.

- Since 2007, up to 11,000 serving members of the military have been diagnosed with mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression;³¹
- In 2012, 2,550 soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines were treated for mental health issues whilst in uniform; of which 11 per cent were reports of PTSD but 21 per cent related to mood disorders such as depression;³²
- In 2012, a total of 3,425 days were lost due to days spent in hospital;³³
- 13,550 UK service personnel who had deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan had at least one episode of care for a mental health disorder between 1 January 2007 and 30 June 2013.³⁴

'I lost 20 years of my life to PTSD'

Joseph, former soldier, in evidence to the CSJ

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Written evidence submitted by All Wales Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Service to Welsh Affairs Select Committee inquiry into services for Armed Forces veterans in Wales, 2011 [accessed via <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmwelaf/writev/sfv/sfv04.htm> (04/10/13)]

³¹ Daily Telegraph, *PTSD on the rise among British servicemen and women after decade of war*, 17 March 2013

³² Ibid

³³ Freedom of Information Reply 17-10-2013-125053001, Ministry of Defence, 13 November 2013

³⁴ Freedom of Information Reply (Reference Redacted), Ministry of Defence, 22 October 2013 [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261193/PUBLIC_1383052345.pdf (10/12/13)]

Whilst PTSD is a major concern, the CSJ has heard that there is currently too heavy a focus on it, detracting from other significant problems, notably depression and stress. In 2005, 28.9 per cent of former service personnel self-reported as having had a mental health problem in service, of which depression (48.3 per cent) and stress (37.9 per cent) were the dominant conditions.³⁵ A follow-up study in 2010 confirmed these trends, with alcohol misuse identified in 13 per cent of respondents, and common mental disorders in 19.7 per cent, far in excess of the PTSD rates of 4 per cent.³⁶

Certain groups within the military are far more vulnerable to suffering from mental ill-health. 49.5 per cent of self-reporting service leavers with poor mental health held a junior rank when leaving, and 78.6 per cent had been in the Army.³⁷ The potential warnings of the future impact of deploying reservists in large numbers, as recommended by the Forces 2020 review, are also clear. Current and former reservists are at greater risk of psychological illness than regulars as a result of their experiences. More than a quarter (26 per cent) of reservists deployed to Iraq had a mental disorder following deployment, and six per cent had PTSD as compared to 19 and four per cent respectively amongst regular counterparts.³⁸

Challenges still exist in the delivery of treatment to those who are currently still serving, in particular the issue of overcoming stigma that will allow those suffering to come forward and receive treatment. The consequences of not receiving treatment, and the interlinked nature of issues such as alcohol substance misuse, crime, family breakdown and homelessness, amongst others, can result in a destructive downward spiral that prevents re-integration into civilian life.

Chapter 5: Crime

'The Army is a way of life. When you come out and you can't find anything else, you fall back on instinct. And that means you fight.'

Mickey, ex-Army and repeat offender

Former members of the Armed Forces make up the largest single occupational group in UK prisons.³⁹ In 2010, DASA estimated that 2,820, or 3.5 per cent, of the prison population had served in the Armed Forces.⁴⁰ However, recent reports suggest that this may have risen to

35 Iversen A et al, "'Goodbye and good luck': the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

36 Fear N et al, 'What are the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of the UK armed forces? A cohort study', *Lancet*, 375, 2010, pp1783–97

37 Iversen A et al, "'Goodbye and good luck': the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

38 Hotopf M et al, 'The health of UK military personnel who deployed to the 2003 Iraq war: A cohort study', *Lancet*, 2006, pp1731–41

39 MacManus D, and Wessely S, 'Why do some ex-armed forces personnel end up in prison?', *British Medical Journal*, 342, 2011

40 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010

7 per cent.⁴¹ As of 13 December 2013, the UK's prison population was 85,255, meaning that approximately 5,970 once served in the Armed Forces, more than double DASA's estimate.

These numbers exist at considerable cost to the state. HMP Wandsworth, for example, reported a seven per cent respondent rate for those declaring themselves to be a former member of the Armed Forces.⁴² Their cost per prisoner based on direct expenditure alone would suggest that Wandsworth's ex-military population costs the taxpayer more than £2 million per year.⁴³

The overwhelming majority of these prisoners were from an Army background: in the DASA study, 77 per cent were ex-Army, 15 per cent served in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, and eight per cent served with the RAF.⁴⁴

The types of crimes that are committed are also significant, with violence against the person being the most common conviction amongst former service personnel, with 33 per cent imprisoned for this offence.

Deployment to combat zones has certainly had an impact on the propensity for violent offending; those service personnel who have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan are more than twice as likely to commit a violent offence than those who have occupied non-frontline roles.⁴⁵ Experience of a greater number of traumatic events also had a direct correlation to the committing of violent offences.⁴⁶ In addition, experiences of combat and trauma during deployment were identified as being strongly associated with violent behaviour following homecoming after an operational deployment.⁴⁷ Alcohol plays a major role in these crimes, with 44 per cent of violent crimes in one study having been committed by those suffering from alcohol misuse.⁴⁸

As such, it is clear that the issue of former members of Armed Forces incarcerated in prisons is dominated by those who served amongst the lower ranks, a cohort that this report has already identified as being more vulnerable to struggling to re-integrate into civilian life.

Violence is inextricably linked to military service, and the preponderance of former soldiers in contact with the criminal justice system in the UK may well suggest an enduring pattern of behaviour that is in part established by service in the military.

41 HM Inspectorate, *People in prison: Ex-service Personnel*, London: HM Inspectorate, March 2014 [accessed via: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmiprobation/joint-thematic/ex-service-personnel-findings.pdf> (19/03/14)]

42 HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *Report on an announced inspection of HMP Wandsworth by HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons*, London: Ministry of Justice, June 2013 [accessed via <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/prison-and-yoi-inspections/wandsworth/wandsworth-2013.pdf> (02/12/13)]

43 Inside Time, *HMP Wandsworth prison regime information* [accessed via: http://www.insidetime.org/info-regimes2.asp?nameofprison=HMP_WANDSWORTH (20/03/14)] Estimate based on £32,015 per prisoner

44 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010

45 MacManus D et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

46 Ibid

47 MacManus D et al, 'Violent behaviour in UK military personnel returning home after deployment', *Psychological Medicine*, 42, 2012, pp1663–73

48 MacManus D et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

Chapter 6: Recommendations

In order to improve the transition process and experience for former, current and future service leavers, the CSJ makes the following recommendations:

Leadership and governance

- Improving data gathering and information sharing between the Department for Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Defence to help identify employment trends within the ex-armed forces population;
- Re-defining the phrase “veteran” to encompass those who have completed basic training and are able to be deployed as part of the trained strength of the Armed Forces so as to better allocate finite resources in future;
- Setting up a Veteran’s Ombudsman with responsibility for overseeing the cross-departmental implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant;
- Establishing an Armed Forces Credit Union to help address the difficulties veterans face in securing credit from civilian banks;
- Allocating greater resources to improving and integrating specific veteran’s mental health programmes in the existing NHS mental health treatment structure. Through improved training and awareness for staff, more effective and accessible treatment can be delivered in local communities, where it can have maximum impact;
- Improving NHS alcohol treatment services by developing a specific ex-Armed Forces programme within it to cater to the specific needs of the client base. Alcohol is a major problem amongst many ex-military personnel, and better and more effective treatment, linking physical and mental health, can help those suffering from addiction overcome this barrier to an effective transition;
- Adding “Have you served in the UK Armed Forces?” as an obligatory question to the registration form for all new claimants at Jobcentre Plus;
- The option for automatic enrolment on the Work Programme for those leaving the Armed Forces who are found to have poor general skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, would also ensure that these individuals are given tailored and intensive support sooner rather than later;
- Allowing service leavers who do not have a job at their time of discharge or a place of their own to live to register as statutory homeless so that their local councils must house them;
- Tackling the severe alcohol problem that exists in the military at a cultural and functional level. Alcohol misuse negatively affects health, employment and domestic relationships in later life, and is a prominent factor in the committing of violent crime. Better outcomes

can be delivered through the improvement of educational campaigns, and the extension of alcohol treatment so that these programmes are offered by every Department for Community Mental Health (DCMHs) team, rather than only some.

Training and support

- Improving the in-service learning offered by the Armed Forces through making a commitment that all on the trained strength who do not already have an A*–C GCSE in Maths and English will have achieved this goal after four years. This will help military personnel overcome educational disadvantage that prevents successful transition;
- Establishing a programme for continuous personal development that will equip military personnel with the skills and experience that they need to succeed in the civilian world and allow them to develop throughout their time in uniform, rather than allow them just two or four weeks to re-train at the very end of their careers;
- The extension of CTP eligibility to everyone who has passed basic training and progressed onto the trained strength of the Armed Forces, so as to better support some of the otherwise most vulnerable into work following their military careers;
- The formal exchanging of qualifications gained in the military for their civilian equivalent as part of the discharge process in order to facilitate service leavers finding work;
- Refocusing and extending the existing transition support services to prioritise need rather than simply length of service, giving greater thought to those who have served a shorter period of time and are in need of greater support;
- Increasing the money made available for training courses to help with transition. That the Individual Resettlement Training Costs (IRTC) has not been increased for 20 years, and is now worth 42 per cent less in real terms, must be corrected;
- Increasing the importance placed on housing during the discharge process by making asking where service leavers are going to live a formal part of the discharge process.

Conclusions

The growing concern surrounding the issue of service leavers' transitions is to be welcomed, but as this report has highlighted, the current system leaves too many transitioning personnel vulnerable to slip through the cracks into adverse circumstances.

Under the current system, a significant minority of service leavers continue to struggle with resettlement and reintegration once they leave the military. While it would be impossible to prevent all the aspects of poor transition, it is possible to better equip service leavers with the skills to help them overcome disadvantage so that they are able to make better choices, along with being better able to insulate themselves from negative life events later in their post-military lives.



This report envisions a new role for the British Armed Forces. In addition, other government departments beyond the Ministry of Defence need to share more of the burden for delivering essential services to the Armed Forces, including those still serving, those who have served in the past, and those who will serve in future.

It is vital that the Government acts quickly to implement these recommendations so that the negative outcomes that have consistently plagued one particular group of service leavers for generations do not continue to repeat themselves, and that future generations of service personnel do not fall into the trap of poor transition. With

the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 public interest in the plight of the military may diminish, at which point it will become extremely difficult to embark upon such reforms. The idea of a debt of gratitude on behalf of the population still exists, but that will not last forever.

The public and political will that currently exists must be capitalised upon to build a better model and better systems for the future that improve outcomes for service leavers. The potential of these individuals that could be harnessed is otherwise being lost. Too many who have served their country risk being abandoned once their military service has finished.

Introduction

The majority of the 20,000 service personnel who are discharged from the Armed Forces each year go on to lead successful lives.⁴⁹ However, too many ex-service personnel end up unemployed, in fractured relationships, struggling to find suitable housing, experiencing difficulties with alcohol consumption or other mental health problems, or in our prisons. Not enough focus is given to these life issues, even if we have taken great strides in the physical rehabilitation of those wounded in service of this country.

For some who leave the UK Armed Forces each year, transition is a difficult and complicated process. As a result:

- Unemployment amongst ex-service personnel aged 18–49 is twice the national average;⁵⁰
- A range of studies have suggested that former members of the Armed Forces account for between 3.5 and 10 per cent of the prison population;⁵¹
- Homelessness amongst those who have left the Armed Forces is estimated to be up to six per cent;⁵²
- Substance abuse and problematic alcohol consumption disproportionately impact veterans and their families;⁵³
- Male soldiers under 30 are three times more likely to be convicted of violent offences than civilians;⁵⁴
- More than a third of Early Service Leavers (ESLs) in one study (33.8 per cent) were identified as having endured the highest levels of childhood adversity;⁵⁵

49 Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

50 Royal British Legion, *Profile and Needs of the Ex-Service Community*, London: RBL, 2006

51 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010, and <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/research/current-projects/jt146soldiers>

52 Riverside Edge, *Homelessness within ex-Armed Forces Personnel*, Liverpool: Riverside Edge, 2011

53 MacManus, D. et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

54 Ibid

55 Buckman J et al, 'Early Service Leavers: A study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early', *European Journal of Public Health*, 23, 2013, pp410–415

- Typically servicemen seeking help from Combat Stress have been through the break-up of at least one marriage.⁵⁶

This report will examine how and why the lives of some service personnel fall apart on leaving the Armed Forces, ask how they can be rebuilt and present solutions to show how these personal tragedies can be prevented.

Defining transition

The move from the military back into civilian life is a well-trodden path; it is estimated that there are 4.8 million people in the UK, one in ten of the adult population, who served in the UK Armed Forces in one form or another;⁵⁷ all of whom have experienced the transition process.

The issue of transition from the military to civilian society does not only affect those who wore the uniform, but also their families, meaning that the UK ex-Armed Forces community could number approximately 10.5 million people,⁵⁸ or 16.5 per cent of the UK population. It is therefore vital that this process is as effective as possible.

After the highly visible conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 – the longest period of sustained, high-intensity operations in a generation – there has been increased interest in getting demobilisation and transition right and increased awareness about how some struggle with this process.

Successful transition

Professor Neil Greenberg, Royal College of Psychiatrists Lead for Military and Veterans Health and Professor of Defence Mental Health at King's College London, told the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) that a good transition involves:

'Using the skills and experience learned in the military, and those which were learned pre-military service too, in order to achieve a successful and healthy post-service life. Clearly this can be broken down into home, work, health and self-actualisation sections. I don't think the aim of a good transition itself is complicated, but sometimes the route to achieving it is.'

Securing employment, stable housing and reintegrating fully into civilian society will have a beneficial impact on the physical and mental health of the individual, and lead to positive domestic relationships.

⁵⁶ Busuttil, W, *Veterans Services in the UK: The Role of Combat Stress*, London: Combat Stress, 2011

⁵⁷ The Royal British Legion, *General Election Manifesto*, London: The Royal British Legion, 2010 (accessed via <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/205299/manifesto-veterans.pdf> (18/11/13))

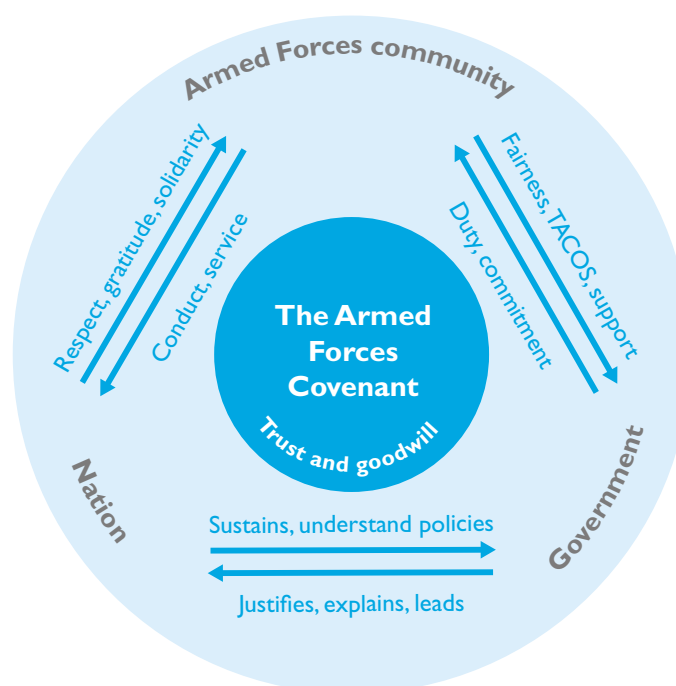
⁵⁸ The Royal British Legion, *Response to the consultation on 'Personal Independence Payment: Second draft of assessment regulations'*, 2012 [accessed via <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/pip-assessment-response-royal-british-legion.pdf> (04/11/13)]

However, this report will highlight how pre-existing social and economic disadvantage remains a severe barrier to achieving these goals at the conclusion of a military career for some service leavers. The results of poor transition are all too real, and can include periods of unemployment, homelessness, family breakdown, alcohol and drug abuse, periods of mental ill-health, and criminality. Often these characteristics are interrelated, and both the cause and consequence of each other.

Current transition support

The British Armed Forces currently offers an extensive programme for transition support. In addition to briefings delivered at a unit level as part of the discharge process, varying levels of access to funds for re-training and recruitment consultants to help service leavers navigate themselves into post-military employment are also provided, dependent on length of service.

The basis of transition support is grounded in the Armed Forces Covenant, first published in May 2011. The Covenant was issued by the Government, and outlined the moral obligation held by the wider UK public to serving and former members of the Armed Forces, including supporting them in their transition back into civilian life and can be expressed in the below diagram:⁵⁹



Ownership of the Covenant resides in the Ministry of Defence (MoD). A statutory annual report is delivered to parliament to inform on its progress. The relationship between the state, society, and service leavers is further elaborated on in the Ministry of Defence's *Strategy for Veterans*, released in 2003.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence, *The Armed Forces Covenant*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2011

⁶⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Strategy for Veterans*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2003

In addition, community covenants were introduced that outlined the relationship between the Armed Forces and local government agencies with the backing of a £30 million grant scheme to support them. Similarly, the corporate covenant has also been promoted to encourage a closer relationship between businesses and charitable organisations and the armed forces community.

The successful implementation of these commitments, and how they affect the wider issue of transition, involves multiple agencies of state, be they the Department of Health, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department of Education (DfE), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), as well as the MoD. To deliver effective outcomes, cross-governmental department support and investment in the process is required.

However, the CSJ has learned that the covenant and current policies are often failing to deliver solutions to the very real problems faced by ex-service personnel at a grassroots level. As a former soldier who now works in prisons and has extensive experience of working with veterans in the criminal justice system told the CSJ: 'The Armed Forces Covenant, the Community Covenants, they're nice bits of paper but are they worth anything? Not really. People may sign up to it – but will they do anything about it at a practical level?'

Scope of this report

This report explores how the current commitments and obligations are not being met, and highlights aspects of poor transition. By demonstrating how they impact upon the individual and their family, we outline how they afflict one particularly vulnerable cohort of the military.

Service leavers who face challenges in their transition are ordinarily those who were affected by severe disadvantage prior to entering the forces. It is this group in particular that suffers disproportionately on leaving. This is particularly concerning as studies of the British military have shown that 69 per cent were found to have come from a broken home, half were classified as coming from a deprived background, and 16 per cent had been long-term unemployed before joining.⁶¹

In addition many of those in service lack basic skills which, if left uncorrected, can seriously inhibit their ability to find employment. A Freedom of Information request made by the CSJ found that 80 per cent of new recruits to the Army between July 2012 and June 2013 possessed the reading age of a 14-year-old or below.⁶² This disadvantage is not resolved whilst in the military. Recent statistics revealed that 39 per cent of those serving in the Army have the literacy of an 11-year-old and 3.5 per cent have the literacy of a seven- to eight-year-old.⁶³

This report will focus on that small but significant minority who struggle to succeed following their Armed Forces careers by analysing the obstacles they face, and the consequences of

⁶¹ Defence Select Committee, Written Evidence, (2005) Analysis of Socio-Economic Backgrounds of non-Officer Recruits

⁶² Freedom of Information Reply 04-11-2013-135613-020, Ministry of Defence, 26 November 2013

⁶³ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, 2013

poor transition. It will highlight how, why, and in what ways they are disadvantaged compared to their peers, and will crucially make a series of detailed policy recommendations to government about how former members of the Armed Forces can be better supported back into civilian life and work.

The report examines five key themes:

- Employment
- Housing and Homelessness
- Alcohol and Drug Use
- Mental Health
- Crime

Negative outcomes in these areas are a terrible reality for some current and future service leavers. This report will tackle why and how this is the case, identify where they are most common in the Armed Forces, and make recommendations on how they can be avoided. It further builds on recent research exploring the transition process, and what is required for it to be successful, most notably the Forces in Mind Trust's (FiMT) *Transition Mapping Study*.⁶⁴

The CSJ has looked at international examples of best practice in facilitating successful transitions – particularly in the US, Canada, and Australia – as well as taking evidence from charities and organisations currently supporting ex-Forces personnel to learn how best to support these individuals in their resettlement and re-integration into civilian society, and where the current system is failing them. We present the stories of service leavers and ex-service personnel themselves, lending their voices and utilising their experiences to understand where we have failed in the past, and how we can succeed in future.

Previous work by the Centre for Social Justice has shown how poverty can destroy potential and hold people back. The seminal report *Breakthrough Britain* outlined the interconnecting pathways to poverty that trap sections of the British population, and transformed the debate on ways to equip people with the tools they need to succeed and not be socially or economically excluded from society.⁶⁵ Our work on military leavers follows this trend.

The work and recommendations of this report will be essential if the sentiment of the Armed Forces Covenant is to have any impact, and Britain is to prove its commitment both to those who have served and to tackling social and economic poverty in the UK. Improving the transition experience of service leavers, particularly the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, will benefit Britain economically, socially and militarily.

⁶⁴ Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

⁶⁵ Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

chapter one

Employment

Finding employment after a military career is, for the vast majority of service leavers, a necessity. 99 per cent of those who left the Armed Forces in 2012/13 were under the age of 55, and 60 per cent of Other Ranks, who traditionally struggle more than officers, who left were between the ages of 20 and 34.⁶⁶ As such, a second career is crucial.

Yet securing employment is difficult for some service leavers, with estimates suggesting that unemployment amongst ex-Service personnel aged 18–49 is twice the national average.⁶⁷ Currently in the UK there are several barriers that prevent the seamless transition from military employment to gainful civilian employment. They include poor skills, a lack of qualifications and a lack of suitable experience, many of which afflict certain groups of service leavers in particular:

The cost of unemployment can be high, affecting physical and mental health, personal finances, life expectancy,⁶⁸ and domestic relationships, which in particular are vital in securing a successful transition.⁶⁹

1.1 Employment amongst the ex-service community

The number of unemployed ex-service personnel in the UK is difficult to measure as Britain does not track its veterans in the same way that nations such as the United States do. However, in 2011 it was estimated that 50,000 of the 2.5 million unemployed people in the UK had served in the military.⁷⁰

66 DASA, *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

67 Royal British Legion, *Profile and Needs of the Ex-Service Community*, London: RBL, 2006

68 Bell D and Blanchflower D, *Youth Unemployment: Déjà Vu?*, Bonn: IZA, 2010

69 Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

70 Federation of Small Businesses, *From Frontline to Civvy Street: Improving the resettlement programme for all Service leavers*, London: Federation of Small Businesses, 2011

In 2012/13, 23,520 people left the Armed Forces, slightly higher than the average over recent years. Of these, 93 per cent of those who were Other Ranks were below the age of 44.⁷¹ Due to the plans outlined in the Strategic Defence and Strategy Review the total of those leaving the Armed Forces through forced redundancies is set to rise so that more than 70,000 personnel will have left in three years, swamping the market place and existing services.

The ability to secure employment has positive knock-on effects for other aspects of a service leaver's life, such as family relationships. As Professor Neil Greenberg stated to the CSJ: 'It's more than getting a job... it's getting a satisfying job. Some service leavers might fall into a poor job which could lead to bad experience of civilian life and that could compound rather than solve issues.'

There is a fear of unemployment in civilian life amongst military personnel. A 2012 poll found that 81 per cent amongst serving UK Armed Forces personnel were most concerned about securing employment when it came to leaving the military.⁷²

There are clear benefits to veteran employment for wider society. Not only do service leavers possess a range of skills that benefit communities, there are also direct financial benefits to reducing unemployment amongst veterans. Whilst it was recently estimated that veteran unemployment will cost Britain over £80 million between 2012 and 2015 in welfare payments,⁷³ there are also far greater costs associated with long-term worklessness. Improving employment outcomes for service leavers will not only reduce this cost, but also the cost of other aspects of poor transition, as unemployment can lead to mental ill-health, family breakdown and severe debt.

Many ex-service personnel, when faced with the task of finding employment and beginning new careers, recognise that they have many useful skills. However, there remain several barriers in securing long-term, productive employment that need to be overcome.

1.2 Employment outcomes for service leavers

The most accurate employment outcome data is drawn from that gathered by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). As the vehicle for finding post-military employment, they are best placed to track those who use their services. They estimate that the overall annual employment rate since 2009/10 for those who used the CTP to be 85 per cent.⁷⁴ However, as will be explained in further detail later in this chapter, the provision of these services does

71 DASA, *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report*, 1 April 2013, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

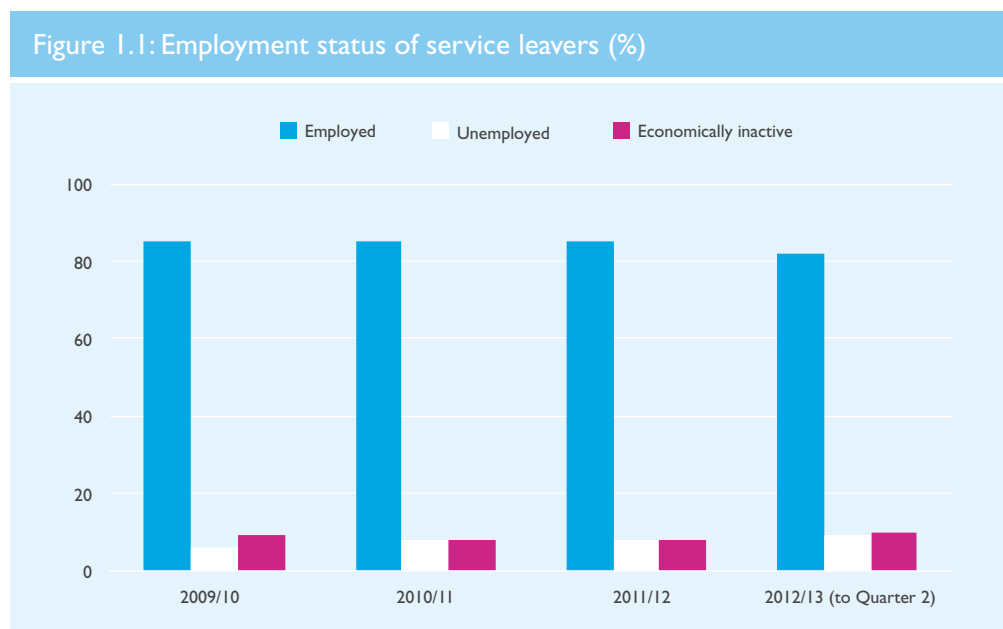
72 Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

73 Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

74 DASA, *Career Transition Partnership quarterly statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, Q1 2009/10 to Q2 2012/13*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 [accessed via http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/health/veterans/career-transition-partnership/financial-year-2012-13-q2/2009_10-to-2012_13-q2.pdf (12/12/13)]

not extend to the most vulnerable service leavers, and as such represents a selection from a more advantageous grouping from within the military cohort.

Employment data for the most recent service leavers who used the CTP, and how it compares with previous years, can be seen in Figure 1 below:⁷⁵



Unemployment amongst those service leavers who access the support offered by the CTP is rising. For those who are excluded from such support, the situation is likely to be even more difficult.

The UK Armed Forces are currently implementing the outcomes of the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR),⁷⁶ which will result in significant structural changes involving both Regular and Reserves forces for the Army in particular. Since 2011, the military has embarked upon a process of downsizing, including substantial redundancies in 4 Tranches, that will see the loss of 33,000 jobs. The majority of redundancies have been voluntary but those being made compulsorily redundant receive enhanced support.

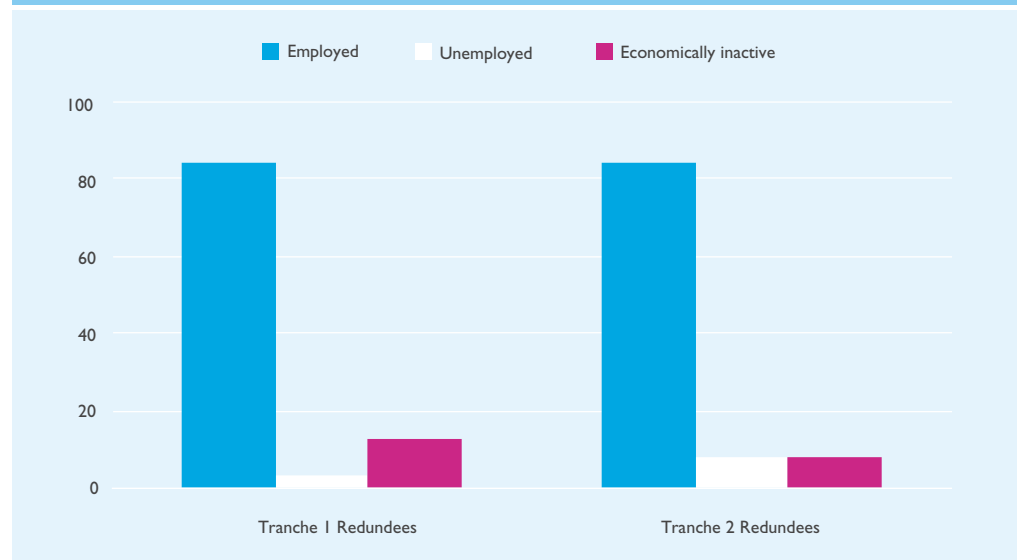
Figure 2 shows that the employment rate for Tranche 2 applicants six months after exit was the same as the employment rate for Tranche 1 applicants but the unemployment rate for Tranche 2 applicants is nearly triple (eight per cent) than for Tranche 1 applicants (three per cent).⁷⁷ This suggests a potentially worsening situation, to which more redundees will be added as the military's reduction in size continues.

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, London: The Stationary Office, 2010

⁷⁷ DASA, *Career Transition Partnership quarterly statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, Q1 2009/10 to Q2 2012/13*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 [accessed via http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/health/veterans/career-transition-partnership/financial-year-2012-13-q2/2009_10-to-2012_13-q2.pdf (12/12/13)]

Figure 1.2: Employment status of armed forces redundees (%)



These employment outcomes are only partly illustrative. More than a third of service leavers since 2009/10 left the military without using the CTP;⁷⁸ and their employment outcomes are unknown. Those who do not use the CTP are predominately those who do not qualify due to not serving a sufficient amount of time, and therefore leave the Armed Forces with little support. It is these individuals that traditionally struggle most in their resettlement.

Currently, employment outcomes for service leavers remain incomplete, due to a lack of information. A data matching exercise between the MoD and DWP could provide an important indicator of whether all service leavers are entering sustainable, long-term employment, not just those who have the benefit of the CTP.

An international comparison: employment outcomes for veterans in the United States

The United States has in recent years endured significant difficulties with re-integrating their veterans into the civilian workplace. In the US, 2.8 million people have served in the military in active operations since 2001, and thus qualify as “veterans.” Personnel turnover is high, which combined with a sluggish economy since 2008 has led to, at times, high veteran unemployment.

In February 2014, unemployment amongst veterans in the United States from post-9/11 conflicts was 9.2 per cent, substantially higher than their civilian counterparts (6.9 per cent).⁷⁹ This represents a universal drop from 2011 figures, where veteran unemployment stood at 12.1 per cent as opposed to 8.7 per cent for civilians. This drop has been attributed to an improving economic outlook, as well as greater involvement and corporate responsibility programmes led by major employers such as Home Depot and Walmart.

⁷⁸ These figures have been extracted from House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, Evidence 24 and DASA, *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

⁷⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, November 2013 [accessed via <http://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea40.htm> (11/12/13)]

The demographics of the veteran cohort are also significant in their employment status, as can be seen below:

Table 1.1: Employment status of veterans aged 18 years and over by age and sex (numbers in thousands) as of November 2013⁸⁰

Post 9/11 veterans	Total Labour Force	Total Employed	Percentage Employed	Total Unemployed	Percentage Unemployed
Men, 18 years and over	2,020	1,838	91	183	9
18 to 24 years	101	83	82	18	18
25 to 34 years	1,057	929	88	128	12
35 to 44 years	451	432	96	19	4
45 to 54 years	308	295	96	13	4
55 to 64 years	94	89	95	6	6
65 years and over	9	9	100	0	—
Women, 18 years and over	410	370	90	40	10
18 to 24 years	46	39	85	6	13
25 to 34 years	182	161	88	21	12
35 to 44 years	121	108	89	13	11
45 to 54 years	31	31	100	0	—
55 to 64 years	31	31	100	0	—
65 years and over	0	0	—	0	—

Unemployment in the veteran community is concentrated heavily amongst male 18–24 year olds, more than one in six of whom is unemployed. While the gap has closed recently, this is still higher than for their civilian counterparts of the same age, and in November 2013 while one in four young veterans were unemployed, the unemployment rate for their civilian counterparts was only 18 per cent.⁸¹

Significantly, the United States are able to track veteran unemployment and are able to issue monthly statistics through the US Labor Bureau, based on surveys conducted amongst 100,000 veterans. This provides the hard data necessary to identify salient trends and allocate resources towards them.

One way in which the Department of Defense has attempted to facilitate veteran employment has been to establish a Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force, to identify opportunities where service members could earn civilian occupational credentials and licenses without the need for additional training – effectively translating skills learned in the military to direct civilian equivalents instantly – with a goal of having all the states enact legislation for credentialing and licensing for veterans by 2015. Thus far 38 states have passed laws removing barriers to service members and veterans earning state licenses, especially in the areas of emergency medical technician, paramedics, commercial driver's license, and licensed practical nursing, which have been credited with improving employment outcomes.⁸²

The Federal Government has also led by example, and now employs more than 290,000 veterans. In the 2012 financial year, 28.79 per cent of all new employees hired by the federal government were veterans, a figure which has increased so far in 2013 to 35.1 per cent.⁸³

80 Ibid

81 Ibid

82 The White House, Press Release, *Fact Sheet: The Obama Administration's Work to Honor Our Military Families and Veterans*, 10 August 2013 [accessed via <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/10/fact-sheet-obama-administration-s-work-honor-our-military-families-and-v> (14/09/2013)]

83 Ibid

1.3 Barriers to securing employment

Despite the skills former members of the armed forces possess, there remain several barriers, aside from the state of the wider economy, to ensuring that service leavers can take up employment. These barriers must be overcome so that service personnel are better skilled for the civilian world of work before they leave the military, or are more adaptable to a greater number of roles, to increase their employment prospects.

Pre-service educational barriers: a lack of basic skills

Through its research, the CSJ has learned that those service leavers who lack basic skills when joining the military are amongst those who struggle the most on transition, and are the most vulnerable. This lack of basic skills, the product of low education attainment before joining the military, represents the biggest barrier to securing employment.

Whilst individuals may be able to succeed and thrive in the military environment despite such low attainment, equivalent success will be far harder in the civilian world without such basic skills, as Kevin Loughlin from Finchale Training College in Durham told the CSJ:

'Limited educational attainment can be a contributory factor for many to escape into the military and achieve outside of the academic system. Sadly we tend to have to start again when they are discharged and all their previous difficulties manifest.'



Whilst the three branches of the Armed Forces extensively train their recruits, the educational attainment of many remains low. This is particularly true within the Army, where 39 per cent of serving members of the Army have the literacy of an 11-year-old.⁸⁴ Between September 2009 and September 2013, 52,200 soldiers left the Army,⁸⁵ meaning that up to

⁸⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, 2013

⁸⁵ These figures have been calculated by combining DASA, *UK Armed Forces Revised Quarterly Personnel Compendium: 1 May 2009 to 1 October 2011*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2012 and DASA, *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Personnel Report 1 October 2013*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

20,358 may have left lacking basic functional skills. Whilst a lack of such skills may not have been an obstacle in the military any equivalent success will be harder in the civilian world, vastly increasing the likelihood of struggling to find employment in their post-military lives.

This is a problem that is based on pre-existing disadvantage; 80 per cent of new recruits to the Army between July 2012 and June 2013 had the reading age of a 14-year-old or below.⁸⁶ This educational failure exists at nearly double the rate of civilian society, where 43.4 per cent of the general population live with the same level of literacy.⁸⁷

As was stated in the Wolf Review of Vocational Education, the attainment of GCSE A*–C in Maths and English is still seen as fundamental to employment and education prospects for those aged 14–19.⁸⁸ Only 29 per cent of Army recruits in 2012/13 had 5 A*–C Grade GCSEs. In contrast, 59.2 per cent of students in England achieved an A*–C in GCSEs, including significantly Maths and English, in the same period.⁸⁹

The consequences of poor skills on employment outcomes are well known, and have been highlighted by previous CSJ work into educational failure.⁹⁰ Such educational failure undeniably affects career prospects, and can lead to low pay and unemployment in later life. Across the most developed countries in the world, employment rates are on average 18 per cent higher for those with an upper secondary education and 28 per cent higher for those with a tertiary education.⁹¹ Even if those with low skills are able to find work, poor literacy skills are a substantial barrier to progressing once in work; 63 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women with very low literacy skills have never received a promotion.⁹² Whilst a lack of skills may not be such an obstacle in the military and can be overcome, in the civilian world such a lack may create impassable barriers.

The three services should ensure that personnel without basic but essential qualifications achieve them whilst still in uniform. The required resources should not necessarily come from within Defence, but should be provided by central government, possibly utilizing in the first instance the fund established from LIBOR fines. This will make good the inadequacies of their education before joining the Armed Forces and enable service personnel to have more flexibility in their choice of roles for their post-service career. It will also give a solid academic backing to vocational degrees, helping them compete in an employment market against those with many years of experience.

65 per cent of Armed Forces personnel surveyed in 2012 lacked a clear idea of what they planned to do after they left the services.⁹³ The gaining of these qualifications and developing

86 Freedom of Information Reply 04-11-2013-135613-020, Ministry of Defence, 26 November 2013

87 National Numeracy, *2011 Skills for Life Survey*, London: National Numeracy, 2013

88 Wolf A, *Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report*, London: Department for Education, 2011

89 Freedom of Information Reply 04-11-2013-135613-020, Ministry of Defence, 26 November 2013 and Department of Education, *GCSE and equivalent results in England, 2012 to 2013 (revised)*, London: Department of Education, 2014 [accessed via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2012-to-2013-revised> (04/01/14)]

90 Most recently in Centre for Social Justice, *Requires Improvement: The cause of educational failure*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

91 OECD, *Education at a Glance, OECD indicators*, Paris: OECD, 2013

92 Dugdale G and Clark C, *Literacy changes lives: An advocacy resource*, London: National Literacy Trust, 2008

93 Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

of these basic skills will ensure that they have the broadest possible choice of roles when it comes to choosing their post-service career; and that a lack of educational attainment does not exclude them from future employment.

Skill translation

'The differences between military life and civilian life should not be underestimated. Even for people whose background and military experience give them a strong chance of finding relevant, rewarding and appropriate work outside of the Armed Forces, the cultural expectations of civilian life can still be a steep learning curve once people leave the Armed Forces.'

Forces in Mind Trust

Problems with relating skills, experiences and qualifications gained in the military to civilian employer requirements can all prevent people securing jobs after service. As Darren Bickerstaffe, from the Future Horizons project told the CSJ, 'There's definitely a cultural issue in relating military skills to civilian employers.'

This affects both service leavers and employers wanting to take on former service personnel, but who lack an understanding about what it is that service leavers can offer them and their business. Russ Pierre, the Business and Employment Director of the charity Surf Action, told the CSJ that:

'We have civilian employers coming to us desperate for the skills that ex-servicemen have. But no one seems to understand the skills that veterans have, and no one is telling veterans themselves where they can go work with the skills and qualifications that they've earned.'

As such, many service leavers, particularly the young, struggle to promote aspects of their employment history in the military that would mark them out as distinct in a highly competitive jobs market. Expressing the skills they possess in a way that civilian employers understand, however, remains a challenge.

Perception of military veterans

The public perception of British service personnel is important as it affects whether they are hired by employers.

In May 2012, Lord Ashcroft's report on the relationship between the Armed Forces and British society found that:

'There was a widespread belief among the public that former personnel were unusually likely to become homeless or go to prison.'⁹⁴

Whilst these are consequences of poor transition, such outcomes are not the norm for the vast majority of service leavers. Such a stereotype is potentially harmful, particularly if it is held by employers. Employers in small-or-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are obviously wary about hiring a person whom they think could be a disruptive and negative influence in the work place, particularly in a less favourable economic climate.

As Professor Greenberg told the CSJ, while veterans occupy a highly respected position in British society, some are also seen as being 'broken heroes' or victims. Furthermore:

'Because the public perception of veterans is that the majority are somehow damaged or unwell, and that much of the NHS is viewed as not being a great provider for the majority of the problems that veterans are thought to suffer from, such as PTSD and alcohol misuse, a potential employer might be reluctant to take them on.'

Significantly, the SDSR has committed the UK Armed Forces to a greater use of reservists by 2020. However, should these negative perceptions of veterans and military personnel remain unchallenged and un-clarified, then this issue of employment is likely to hamper both transitions but also future operational effectiveness. Professor Greenberg explains:

'The same might be true for companies who consider employing reservists. An employer may think, for instance, "What's in it for me or my business?" and maybe decide that it would be unhelpful to take on either an "already broken" staff member who has little hope of getting treatment for their condition on the NHS, or even a reservist who may end up this way after being released for a deployment. In either case, it may well be assumed that it will cost the employer more to take them on than the value they would offer the business even though the MoD will, in some cases, provide reservists with mental health care treatment once they have been discharged.'

Closer ties between civilians and service leavers and veterans are therefore vital to help counter negative myths surrounding those with experience of the Armed Forces.

Lack of incentives for employers

While there is demonstrable public goodwill directed towards members of the Armed Forces by the British public, and while the UK has backed the Armed Forces publically with Armed Forces Day, this does not always translate to the provision of care for veterans. Because the UK does not track veterans, or as of yet only has limited evidence of successful employment schemes, at present there are no real tangible financial gains or incentives for employers to take on service leavers.

⁹⁴ Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

In the United States veteran unemployment has been aided by new partnerships being formed between the government and businesses across the country. Tax credits have been offered; the **Returning Heroes Tax Credit** provides businesses that hire unemployed veterans with a maximum credit of \$5,600 per veteran, and the **Wounded Warriors Tax Credit** offers businesses that hire veterans with service-connected disabilities with a maximum credit of \$9,600 per veteran,⁹⁵ although these are due to expire at the end of the 2013. In addition, the Joining Forces initiative aims to increase links between veterans and their families and corporate entities. This has resulted in businesses hiring and training more than 290,000 veterans and military spouses. Additionally, companies have committed to hire or train an additional 435,000 veterans and their spouses by the end of 2018.⁹⁶ This has given many American servicemen confidence about their future prospects outside of the military: 'Part of their confidence came from the knowledge that tax relief was available to American companies employing veterans, and that veterans had an advantage in applying for federal government jobs, especially if they were disabled.'⁹⁷ British ex-service personnel, whether they are fit or injured, currently lack the same support, which is a travesty and must be put right.

Because of the challenges in perceptions of military personnel and veterans held by members of the public and potential employers, there is little awareness of the skill benefits that hiring ex-service personnel can bring, and the incentives that these hold. For example, the majority of SMEs surveyed in 2012 (55 per cent) stated that they struggled to find candidates with the skills and qualities that they needed. However, 84 per cent stated that they had not interviewed any former members of the Armed Forces in the last five years and while there is no guarantee that service leavers or veterans would possess these skills, they would seem to be a resource that SMEs could tap further. 71 per cent of those who had interviewed former members of the Armed Forces believed that they had made a positive impression,⁹⁸ and so any exploration of closer links would clearly be in their interest.

1.4 Institutional support: efforts to improve employment outcomes for service leavers

There are a variety of institutional support schemes being managed with the goal of improving the employment outcomes of service leavers.

In-service learning

The British Armed Forces provides multiple opportunities for personal development and vocational learning that are available to its members, both whilst they are still serving and also once they leave the military.

95 The White House, Press Release, *Fact Sheet: Returning Heroes and Wounded Warrior Tax Credits*, 21 November 2011 [accessed via <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/21/fact-sheet-returning-heroes-and-wounded-warrior-tax-credits> (02/09/13)]

96 The White House, Press Release, *Fact Sheet: The Obama's Administration's Work to Honor Our Military Families and Veterans*, 10 August 2013 [accessed via <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/10/fact-sheet-obama-administration-s-work-honor-our-military-families-and-v> (30/08/2013)]

97 Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

98 Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012

The majority of courses undertaken involve apprenticeships. There is considerable enthusiasm for this amongst serving personnel; in the academic year 2011/12 some 7,453 apprenticeships and 2,676 advanced apprenticeships were completed.⁹⁹ Of these, the Army occupied the greatest proportion, with 60 per cent of completed apprenticeships and 63 per cent of advanced apprenticeships being completed by Army personnel.¹⁰⁰

With an annual value of £27 million, the Army apprenticeship programme is the largest UK employer of apprentices. Around 95 per cent of soldiers enrol on a trade-related apprenticeship during Phase Two training and continue their programme into the Field Army. At any time, there are more than 15,000 soldiers enrolled on an apprenticeship, with a 90 per cent pass rate.¹⁰¹

This is certainly to be commended as very few other employers in Britain offer such opportunity for self-improvement and development. Furthermore, the quality of such courses and their teaching were rated as “Good” by OFSTED in 2013.¹⁰² This is an improvement from the last inspection in 2009, which rated the courses as “Satisfactory”, and means that they are now on a par with those offered by the Royal Navy and the RAF, rated “Good” in 2009.¹⁰³

In evidence to the Defence Select Committee, Rear Admiral Simon Williams stated that the MoD tried to get civilian accreditation for what they offered in terms of training in order to better employment outcomes for service leavers.¹⁰⁴ Using the example of paramedic qualifications, it was noted that those who have served as combat medics are ideally placed to continue this work in the civilian sphere as part of emergency first aiders. The MoD told the House of Commons Defence Committee in July 2013 that there were three pilot projects looking at paramedic qualifications in place or being considered. These projects included:

- Scoping a new course for new trainees to close the gap between basic military medic training and what is required to work in civilian ambulances;
- Professional recognition for existing military medics working with the University of Cumbria and Yorkshire Ambulance Trust
- A possible further project working with West Midlands and East England Ambulance Trust.¹⁰⁵

99 House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons

100 Ibid.

101 Army, *Good OFSTED report for Army apprenticeships* [accessed via: <http://www.army.mod.uk/news/25463.aspx> (29/08/13)]

102 OFSTED, *Directorate of Educational and Training Services (Army) (DETS (A)) Army Apprenticeships: Learning and Skills Inspection Report*, London: OFSTED, 2012

103 OFSTED, *The quality of welfare and duty of care for recruits and trainees in the Armed Forces: Ofsted's report to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces*, London: OFSTED, 2009

104 House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, 2013

105 Ibid

Such a development is important, and has in the past been highlighted as a limitation of the transition process.¹⁰⁶ The option to gain equivalent qualifications is essential. Dave, a former soldier who served for nearly 30 years as a mechanic in the Army, told the CSJ:

'I had the qualifications, but only military ones. Civilian employers wouldn't listen that they were the equivalent; they just wanted what they specified, what they knew. There was no understanding about what I had. You've got to be able to just swap them over. In the end, I went back to college, so as to get the same civilian qualifications for what I could already do.'

Case study: George's story¹⁰⁷

George joined the Royal Navy at the age of 17 and spent 16 years in service, reaching the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

He suffered a number of injuries and problems with his back during service and eventually left the Navy in 2007 with the hope of becoming a medical practice manager.

During his career, George was fully trained as a medic, achieving a qualification far in excess of a nursing qualification (and more specialised) that allowed him to run his own medical centre on a ship capable of looking after the health and welfare of 280 people at any one time. When he left the Navy, however, his qualification was not transferable and did not allow him to become a nurse or practise manager within his new civilian environment.

George did have some access to resettlement when leaving the Navy, but did not make full use of this as he concentrated on his medical issues and improving his physical health. He wrongly assumed, and was not corrected, that his medical experience and training would allow him to transfer easily to civilian life. This unfortunately was not the case, and due to a lack of suitable qualifications, and he spent several years unemployed, putting strain on other aspects of his life such as family relationships.

After several years of lost potential, George was able to re-train and has now been accepted to study for a degree in Bio-Medical Science.

It would also be possible to equip all service leavers with the most basic of civilian qualifications. A heavy goods vehicle driving licence (in addition to the military licence, which is not admissible for civilian companies), or a CCS qualification to work on a building site, would enable those who otherwise leave with nothing to have something tangible and the ability to at least work somewhere.

¹⁰⁶ Federation of Small Businesses, *From Frontline to Civvy Street: Improving the resettlement programme for all Service leavers*, London: Federation of Small Businesses, 2011

¹⁰⁷ Case study provided by Finchale Training College, Durham. Name has been changed

I.5 Leaving the Armed Forces: the CTP

Since 1998, transition services for those leaving the Armed Forces have been supplied by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), a partnering agreement between the Ministry of Defence and Right Management Ltd. CTP delivers the resettlement process and benefits that service leavers are entitled to, providing support for two years both prior to and after leaving the Services.

The CTP is primarily focused on helping service leavers to find suitable employment in a second career by preparing adequately whilst still in uniform. Service personnel learn how to construct CVs, learn interview skills and techniques, as well as do additional training through vocational courses. Through workshops, classes, and the provision of training courses the CTP aims to secure employment for service leavers or equip them with the necessary tools to find work shortly after discharge.

The CTP administers a free recruitment service for employers, maintaining an online vacancy database of service leavers, hosting employment fairs in various regional locations across the UK, and employing a team of employment consultants that are available to advise and assist with employer's recruitment needs. By advertising both employment opportunities to job seekers, as well as candidates to employers, it is hoped that former service personnel can be lined up and placed rapidly into jobs to help them transition effectively.

The CTP also caters for those who are planning to retire from work completely, or who are planning to enter full-time education, aiming to prepare them for civilian life.

Eligibility criteria

Not all service personnel are eligible for the full range of services offered by the CTP. Eligibility for these is governed by length of service, with those who have given longest getting the most support. This graduated resettlement model is designed to support retention by encouraging personnel to serve for longer. All those who are part of the trained strength of the military have access to Unit Resettlement Officers (1st Line) as well as regionally based ones (2nd Line) for information and advice on resettlement at any time during their careers. All service leavers, regardless of the length of time that they have been in uniform, also have access to briefs on housing advice provided by the Joint Service Housing Advice Organisation (JSHAO).

For those personnel who have completed between four and six years or more service, they are entitled to an Employment Support Programme (ESP). Those who have served six years or more are entitled to the Full Resettlement Service (FRS). The differences between the two are explained below:

The Employment Support Programme (ESP)

The ESP is available for those with four years of service and can be accessed from six months before discharge up until two years after leaving. Each service leaver is assigned an individual career consultant from one of two charities, either the Regular Forces Employment Agency (RFEA) or, if an officer, the Officer Association (OA). The consultant is instructed to provide detailed advice on the types of service which the individual may be suitable for in the region to which he or she intends to relocate.

Both the RFEA and the OA maintain a comprehensive database of jobs which are matched to the details inputted by ex-service users. The consultants provide support and advice to link service leavers and veterans to potential employers. The consultant is also supposed to give advice on other regional matters such as schooling and housing, which are important factors in transition, particularly if the service person has a family or dependents.

The Full Resettlement Service (FRS)

The FRS process begins up to two years before discharge and its support is also offered for two years afterwards. The types of services provided include:

- Allocation of a personal career consultant, with whom the service leaver can have unlimited face-to-face contact in order to find a new job;
- Various workshops, which will assist a service leaver in producing a CV, researching the job market, preparing for an interview and responding to job adverts. There are also options which give guidance to those service leavers who intend to retire after leaving the Armed Forces;
- An Individual Resettlement Training Costs (IRTC) grant of £534 that can be used towards meeting the costs of re-training for a civilian career during resettlement;
- Access to the ESP;
- Graduated Resettlement Time (GRT): Those who have served at least six years are able to take 20 days of GRT, paid leave to undertake training for a post-military career and/or to find accommodation if necessary. This rises to 35 days for those who have completed 16 years or more service.

The process

Resettlement Training is undertaken at the CTP's specialist training centre in Aldershot. A range of Contract Funded (CF) training courses are available and are divided into three departments:

1. **The Management Studies Department:** Offers courses for potential bursars, police officers, project managers, facilities managers and so forth.
2. **The Engineering Department:** Offers courses on security, health and safety, electrical installation, IT and other related industries.
3. **The Building Trades Department:** Offers courses in bricklaying, carpentry & joinery, painting and decorating, plumbing, plastering, dry lining, texturing and tiling.

The costs of these courses, if a CF course, can be paid for out of the service person's IRTC grant of £534.

Service leavers may also undertake training through a network of external, civilian training organisations, arranged through the CTP having been vetted for quality. Grants may be available to pay for these.

A portion or all of the GRT can also be spent completing a work placement with a civilian employer in order to gain experience of a particular role or to demonstrate skills. In 2005/6 just 20 per cent of those using the CTP services completed such a work attachment, but of these 47 per cent were offered, and accepted, a job at its conclusion. A further 16 per cent were offered a job but chose not to accept it.¹⁰⁸



Medical discharges

Those service personnel who are discharged from the Armed Forces for medical reasons have access to the full range of services, including the IRTC grant, GRT and CTP services, regardless of the length of time that they have served, even if they are discharged during training. For those who are severely injured, the Defence Recovery capability provides employment advice and training matched to their disabilities and recovery time. There is also a fast-track programme available to help the less severely injured gain employment prior to discharge. Those who are unable to undertake resettlement services because of their medical condition can defer resettlement for up to two years after discharge and, in extreme cases, resettlement provision may be transferred to the spouse of the service leaver.

Use of the Career Transition Partnership

Despite the availability and the offer of services by the CTP participation is not mandatory. On average, around 20,000 people leave the Armed Forces each year. In 2012/13, however, that number is forecast to be higher due to the enforced redundancies as part of the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). While a large number of service leavers do utilise what is offered during transition, many do not.

On average 63 per cent of service leavers have engaged with the CTP in the past four years.¹⁰⁹ In addition, given that the substantial redundancies as part of the SDSR have resulted in more members of the Armed Forces leaving the services over the past two years, this means take up is significantly lower by number, even if percentage remains similar.

In terms of total outflows, the numbers who have accessed some CTP services in the past four years are as follows:

¹⁰⁸ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007, p18

¹⁰⁹ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel*, London: House of Commons, Evidence 23

Table 1.2: Use of Career Transition Partnership services by those discharged from the trained strength, 2009 to Quarter 2, 2013

Year	Outflow	Number who used CTP	% of outflow that received CTP Support	Number who did not use the CTP	% of outflow that did not receive CTP support
2009/10	12,280	8,440	69	3,840	31
2010/11	13,960	8,950	64	5,010	36
2011/12	17,650	11,300	64	6,350	36
2012/13	9,410	6,390	68	3,020	32

Thus it can be seen that 18,220 trained service personnel, 34 per cent of the total outflow from the trained strength,¹¹⁰ left the Armed Forces without using the CTP, either because they were ineligible for support or chose not to do so.

The MoD and the CTP does not currently gather data on the reasons why those eligible for the CTP services chose not to use it. Such data would, however, be extremely illustrative, given that in 2011/12 alone 15 per cent of service leavers, or 3,160 people, were eligible and registered with the CTP but did not use the service, and a further 9 per cent (1,930 people) were eligible but did not even register with the CTP.¹¹¹ Such a trend is a substantial increase on the nine per cent of eligible service leavers who did not utilise the CTP when going through resettlement in 2005–6.¹¹²

Currently the assumptions made for not using the CTP include: 'If they already had a job or training plans lined up, they felt confident supporting their own career development, were retiring and not seeking support for that retirement, or chose to look for work independently.'¹¹³ These are both logical and positive reasons for not engaging with the CTP. Such assumptions do not, however, include more negative appraisals; that those eligible chose not to use the CTP because they do not recognize its value, as previous reports have noted in their research,¹¹⁴ or worse still those that do not use it because they do not know what they are entitled to. This was identified as being the third most common reason for those who left in 2005–6 for not using the CTP.¹¹⁵ The CSJ has heard from sources close to CTP that many service leavers see them as part of the military hierarchy and system. Those who are angry with the military at their point of leaving, or just want to get out of the forces and move on with their lives as quickly as possible, do not want to engage with the CTP and prefer to try and make their own way.

¹¹⁰ These figures have been extracted by comparing outflow from the trained strength with CTP participation from DASA, *UK Armed Forces Quarterly Personnel Report, 1 October 2013*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 [accessed via <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/personnel/military/quarterly-personnel-report/2013-10-01/1-october-2013.pdf> (13/12/13)] and DASA, *Career Transition Partnership quarterly statistics: UK Regular Service Personnel Employment Outcomes Q1 2009/10 to Q2 2012/13*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 [accessed via <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/health/veterans/career-transition-partnership/financial-year-2012-13-q2/2009-10-to-2012-13-q2-revised.pdf> 13/12/12]]

¹¹¹ DASA, *Career Transition Partnership Ex-Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, by outflows from Service*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

¹¹² National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007

¹¹³ Data Analytical Services Agency, *Career Transition Partnership Ex-Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, by outflows from Service*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

¹¹⁴ Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the Transition Process for Service Personnel Returning to Civilian Life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

¹¹⁵ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007

The impression of the CTP at unit level within the military also influences participation.¹¹⁶ The CSJ has heard that the services offered by the CTP do not enjoy a positive reputation amongst some sectors of the military. This means that in some cases those eligible have chosen not to register. This is a problem that exists not with the CTP, but at unit level. The CSJ has also learned that, due to manpower shortages in the British Armed Forces and the Army's operational requirements in Afghanistan in particular, troops transitioning out have been unable to take any resettlement time. Despite resettlement and transition support being an entitlement, operational pressures, and pressure at a unit level has resulted in some soldiers being unable to utilise all of the time set aside for transition, and have subsequently left the forces without any support and in a disadvantaged position.

Significantly, with redundancies still being made as part of the restructuring of the Army, with its increased role for Reservists, until these are recruited the current regular forces will be called upon to do more with a smaller pool of personnel. This will affect all three Services within the Armed Forces and the time dedicated to transition will suffer as a result of operational commitments.

The CSJ understands that the MoD is currently investigating the levels of engagement with the CTP further. We urge them to begin to specifically gather data from those service personnel who are separating from the Armed Forces but not using the CTP services they are entitled to in order to find out why. It is also important to collect outcome data on these service personnel so as to demonstrate what their employment prospects are in comparison to those who utilise the services offered by the CTP.

It should also be highlighted that, of those ineligible in 2011/12, 79 per cent of service leavers were from the Army.¹¹⁷ This is a common trend that is repeated most years due to the higher personnel turnover. However, it is this group – young at point of exit, former Army, short-service personnel who joined the Forces at a young age, without qualifications – who the CSJ have learned are the prominent demographic group being encountered by the charities working with those who struggle in the re-integration and resettlement process.

Therefore, whilst the MoD are able to point to the admirable statistic that 85 per cent of the 21,500 Armed Forces leavers from 2011/12 that used the CTP were in employment within six months of separation, this fails to present a full or accurate picture of ex-Armed Forces employment. A massive 34 per cent of the 53,300 trained personnel who left the Armed Forces between April 2009 and September 2012 did not use the CTP, and as such the figures relating to employment need to be viewed accordingly.

Impressions of the Career Transition Partnership

A 2007 National Audit Office (NAO) report on leaving the Armed Forces stated that they had 'found that the Department provides good services that facilitate civilian employment but some Service Leavers do not benefit from them.'¹¹⁸ As outlined above, there are a significant

¹¹⁶ Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the Transition Process for Service Personnel Returning to Civilian Life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

¹¹⁷ Data Analytical Services Agency, *Career Transition Partnership Ex-Service Personnel Employment Outcomes, by outflows from Service*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

¹¹⁸ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007

number of service leavers each year who are either excluded from accessing the services provided by the CTP or choose not to use them.

However, of those who do, it can be seen that impressions are generally favourable. Of those who attended the three-day Career Transition Workshop, the CV writing element was rated as useful or very useful by 86 per cent of respondents who had used the services between 2005 and 2006 in the NAO study.¹¹⁹ The CSJ observed this element of the course, and learned how those on the workshop were able to construct their CVs, learning about strengths and weaknesses through peer consultation, under the charge of a specialist career consultant. Similarly, interview techniques were highly regarded with 79 per cent of respondents rating it as useful.¹²⁰ In terms of some of the specific classes added as part of the transition process, 82 per cent of officers who attended the “Self employment awareness and small business start up” workshop found it useful in comparison with 48 per cent of junior ranks who attended.¹²¹

In addition, the CSJ has heard much anecdotal evidence surrounding the experience of the CTP as part of its research, and there are several common themes that have emerged that characterise negative impressions of the service offered by the CTP.

One major complaint is that the CTP lacks flexibility or individuality, which prejudiced many former service personnel's views against it. As Alex Ford, who left the RAF after 25 years on voluntary redundancy, stated to the CSJ: ‘It was process driven, with no real flexibility for individual circumstances and personal plans.’ As a private company designed to deliver one particular service, and measured on how effective it is, the emphasis on securing any role, rather than moving towards a long-term career, meant that he found the services offered by the CTP to be too simplistic. He told the CSJ: ‘As a commercial organisation, I found that it was more about attending courses for the sake of numbers in official figures than what you would learn on them.’ Ford further added that he did not believe there to be any scope to be an individual within the process:

‘It was assumed that because I’d been a technician in the RAF I would simply be a technician in civilian life. But I’d done that for 25 years and wanted a change in career, and the CTP wasn’t flexible enough to help with that.’

The lack of flexibility and pressure to get into a job quickly for the benefit of statistics was also noted was by Major Mike Peters, who had served 34 years in the Army Air Corps. From his experience he believed that there was an over-reliance on traditional ex-military roles, such as security. Similarly, Peters also believed that, rather than try and direct him towards a career, he was simply being directed to take any job that came up, regardless of his own plans. He found it frustrating that he could ‘only do what the CTP allow you to do.’ Since he knew what he wanted to move into as a new career, and that it was not covered by the CTP, it was to his mind a wasted exercise.

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

Part of this lack of flexibility is due to the provision of funds for training courses. The £534 set aside for resettlement training has not changed since 1993, which means that in real terms the sum is worth 42 per cent less now than in previous years due to inflation. While it can still be used for CTP courses worth the same amount, in terms of flexibility, access to outside courses is greatly reduced as the funds no longer cover the costs.

Peters also found that accessibility to actually attend the courses was a major issue:

'Since costs incurred whilst travelling to a course are separate from those course costs covered, it greatly reduced the accessibility of the courses, given that most are held at the RTC in Aldershot. The lack of flexibility in the funding system meant that I didn't use my full allowance.'

The fact that travel costs are separate from the allowance is a major problem and a potential barrier to engaging with the CTP and using their services. This is particularly true for troops stationed in Germany or Cyprus. The travel costs must be reimbursed by the unit, not the CTP, and as such requires a different form and involves another level of bureaucracy.

Whilst accommodation is also provided at the training centre at Aldershot, staying there means taking time off work. Some commanding officers are reluctant to grant this, prioritising group operational duties over resettlement classes that will benefit the individual alone. As such, many feel that they cannot realistically take the time off work to attend, as doing so will create a significant backlog for them to work through.

The CSJ has also learned that, given operational pressures in Afghanistan, there is an informal obstacle placed on taking time from operational duties to participate in training for a post-military career. Even though such time is an entitlement, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that applications are being blocked. Whilst some officers are able to navigate this, lower ranks, due to the culture of the military, will not challenge such a decision, and thus forfeit their entitlement, putting them at risk of poor preparation for civilian life. One service leaver, whose role in the Army was to train those preparing to deploy to Afghanistan, told the CSJ:

'I was given a choice. Go off and do my resettlement training, and let these guys go off to Afghan without the proper preparation or stay and spend my last days in the Army training them up. I wasn't going to leave my mates unprepared. So I stayed, and then left the Army with nothing.'

When visiting the Resettlement Training Centre at Aldershot, the CSJ also learned from participants on the various courses that an expectation exists that less time will be available for re-training in future. This is because the reductions in manpower and the delay in growing the Reserve forces will mean that given that the current burden of operation duties will be placed on fewer individuals.

The amount of time available to retrain is also inadequate. 20 days is not enough time for service leavers to become entirely proficient in new skills or fields, especially if they are then to compete against more experienced civilians for jobs once out of uniform.

There is also a regularly stated belief that the classes offered by the CTP are designed to appeal to the lowest common denominator. As such officers in particular found certain elements tedious and unnecessary, which prejudiced their view of the process. However, given that officer employability has been traditionally far higher than those non-commissioned service personnel, such an approach is understandable.

1.6 The Armed Forces Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant, as previously discussed, is designed to ensure that current and former service personnel suffer no disadvantage as a result of their service, and are given priority access to state services like healthcare.

Whilst full of good intentions, it is often failing to deliver at a local level, where it is needed most.

One of the most striking examples of this grassroots failure in relation to employment outcomes is in Jobcentre Plus. Through conversations with charities across the country, the CSJ has learned that the current system of Armed Forces Champions is not producing a uniformly effective service. Many service leavers are not being directed to services and charities that are there to help due to a lack of knowledge and training amongst staff other Jobcentre staff. Those who work with former service personnel, sometimes the most vulnerable, have told the CSJ that they have never had any contact with their regional Armed Forces champion. Instead, they liaise directly with charities to resolve problems.

Currently, service leavers are not being asked whether they were in the Armed Forces when they register as standard. As such they are both unaware of, and unable to access, the various schemes available to them and the benefits that come with being a veteran in the UK. The question “Are you ex-Armed Forces?” needs to become part of the standard cadence asked when new individuals register at their local Jobcentre. Whilst this would require a system that could check such information was accurate, such a step would be easy to implement, and combined with better education of staff deliver improved outcomes, not only in employment but also in other equally pressing issues such as housing.



Another issue with the system of Armed Forces champions is that they are based in 39 regional hubs across the UK, but these do not always accurately reflect the Armed Forces community of the UK. A prime example of this involves Catterick, the largest garrison in north-west Europe. The Armed Forces champion for the Catterick area is not based in the local Jobcentre at North Allerton, but in Leeds, 50 miles

away. Public transport between the two is extremely limited. Armed Forces champions are supposed to aid both the serving and former Armed Forces community in their enquiries and respond to their needs. This cannot be done effectively if they are based in the wrong place.

In some places, such as Exeter, the CSJ has heard that Armed Forces champions are working. This, however, is the result of a passionate, individual drive and effective liaising with local charities rather than a coordinated national effort. This example of good practice must be promoted further and replicated across the country.

1.7 Early-Service Leavers

‘It has long been observed that the existing transition support fails to meet the needs of ESLs.’

Future Horizons

Those personnel who leave the military after less than four years of service are designated as Early Service Leavers (ESLs).

It is traditionally this group that have suffered greater unemployment following discharge. ESLs are defined as those who are discharged from the Army, either compulsorily or at their own request, before completing four years of service. It includes those who fail to complete their training, those who did but left before officially entering service, and those who are compulsorily discharged due to disciplinary action, such as for failing mandatory drug tests. Unless medically discharged, ESLs are excluded from the transition support offered by the CTP.

Currently, all ESLs are treated the same, regardless of whether they have completed training and been part of the trained strength – perhaps even having served on an operational tour – or whether they failed basic training. Such a distinction must be reviewed. Whilst the majority of ESLs fail to navigate basic training, 1,990 members of the trained strength still left the military before completing four years service in 2012/13.¹²² They received no additional support other than the standardised briefing.

The standardised discharge pathway for ESLs is laid out in the briefing JSP 575 document. It is short and sharp, and often lasts little more than two weeks. It consists of a one-to-one interview with the Unit Resettlement Officer, where any overt problems with vulnerability should be identified. It is intended that the Unit Interview Officer puts the ESL in contact with the DWP, through its Jobcentre Plus offices, which provides support for helping that person in to work once they have been discharged. Contact will also be made on behalf of the ESL with the Joint Services Housing Advice Office (JSHAO) or the Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-services (SPACES) at Catterick if there are accommodation issues and other ex-service charities where appropriate.

This interview is followed by a group briefing outlining the availability of ex-service and welfare organisations, employment issues, financial matters, and accommodation are all outlined using

¹²² Freedom of Information Reply FOI 23-12-2013-153647-009-Johnston, Ministry of Defence, 16 January 2014

a standardised set of slides.¹²³ At the conclusion of this presentation, the ESLs are given a booklet containing the information they have been given for future reference. Previous reports, however, have noted that the opportunity to take this away for future consultation is rarely taken.¹²⁴

The establishment and successful trial of the Future Horizons programme last year is a major step in improving the transition service available for those often at greater disadvantage.

Future Horizons

Future Horizons, a new programme funded by the Forces in Mind Trust, launched in January 2012 as an initial pilot scheme at Catterick Infantry Training Centre (ITC) that targeted ESLs directly and aimed to provide a comprehensive transition programme to help them find and remain in employment.

Specialist support has been provided by a consortium of ex-service charities, welfare-to-work organisations and other partners, led by the Regular Forces Employment Association (RFEA), backed by the MoD.

The programme offers:

- A pre-discharge interview to identify an individual's transitional needs, skills and strengths, assess vulnerability and start to develop a personal development action plan;
- Referral at any time to the appropriate service or other charities for those with welfare or other immediate specialist needs;
- Extensive employment support and job-finding assistance;
- The services of a locally assigned personal consultant to provide advice, guidance and mentoring if required;
- Access to a comprehensive range of life skills, vocational training and education courses, to address specific needs and obstacles to gaining suitable employment;
- A central help desk to provide advice, refer individuals to the most appropriate level of the programme, and then track their journey to employment;
- A web portal which links into other web based services aimed at supporting service veterans for life.

It is based on a needs assessment and offers access to the required training, personal development and educational courses to overcome barriers to work and ensure individuals are moving towards being 'job ready' once discharged from the service.

The initial set up of the programme was supported and funded by The Royal British Legion with continuation funding from the Forces in Mind Trust. By the end of May 2012 over 440 ESLs had engaged with the programme.

Future Horizons reviewed the current discharge process conducted by the Army at Catterick ITC in order to see where it could be improved. They introduced civilian staff and increased interaction with the ESLs prior to their briefing. This staff then helped present information

¹²³ Ministry of Defence, *JSP 575 Early Service Leavers: Guidance Notes for Resettlement Staff*, Issue No. 4, London: Ministry of Defence, 2010

¹²⁴ Future Horizons Programme, *Transition Support for British Army Early Service Leavers: An evaluation of the Future Horizons Programme Infantry Training Centre, Catterick*, Catterick: Future Horizons Programme, 2013

from the standardised slides in a more accessible way, more suitable to the low education attainment and reading age exhibited by Infantry ESLs. It also allowed the opportunity for increased personalisation of the transition process, and to take into account elements of individuality amongst the ESLs.

The results of the Future Horizons project are encouraging. During their evaluation and trial period at the Infantry Training Centre at Catterick Garrison, they engaged with 777 ESLs, and had a 99 per cent take up.¹²⁵

The programme tracked 84 per cent of the ESLs who had joined, offering them a range of employment and training support and opportunities. This involved providing additional support through liaising with Specialist Employment Consultants and other expert and specialist organisations, to help provide a more personal, tailored and bespoke service.

As a result after six months 63.4 per cent of the ESLs were in employment or training. As of 31 January 2013 39 per cent had been in employment for 13 weeks or more.¹²⁶

The CSJ welcomes the announcement from the Ministry of Defence of the adoption of this model across all three branches of the Armed Forces. However, we note an issue in the way the ESL designation currently applies to all of those who have served less than four years. There is currently no difference between those who have served a day and those who may have completed an operational tour but left before completing four years. These individuals should receive more transition support. In addition the Future Horizons Project also highlights several weaknesses with the current transition package offered to those who leave the military after four years, and demonstrates the advantage of a more personalised service.

1.8 Conclusion

Employment alone does not guarantee a successful transition, but it is a vital step in the process. Secure employment provides financial security and can insulate the service leaver against other negative aspects of transition later in life.

The CSJ has identified that there are several weaknesses with the current systems that exist within the military hierarchy, from unit level upwards, and within the current political provision.

The CTP offers a comprehensive service, offered on a sliding scale of reward dependent on time served, and one that is designed purely around securing employment for the service leaver. While the programme enjoys an impressive rate of success, as has been shown there is a substantial number of service personnel that do not engage with its services for both positive and negative reasons, and some of the most vulnerable do not have access. The small amount of money available for re-training and the short period of time available to train in are also other factors that should be addressed.

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Ibid

There are several barriers that disproportionately afflict a proportion of those who leave the Armed Forces each year; in particular the Infantry, and result in poor outcomes, but these can be overcome through investment in personal development and improvements to the career transition service currently offered.

chapter two

Housing and homelessness

Issues surrounding housing for ex-service personnel are very significant. Currently, the main focus of transition services involves post-military employment, with the issue of housing a distant second. Insufficient attention is paid during the transition process to where a service leaver is going to live after discharge; it is too often assumed by the military hierarchy that they will find somewhere. Lieutenant General Sir Mark Mans, who as former Adjutant General to the British Army held responsibility for personnel policies, told the CSJ that the importance of housing must play an increased role in any discussion on transition to prevent negative outcomes in future. The CSJ has learned that a particularly vulnerable group of military service leavers – those who have served for shorter periods of time and came from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds – disproportionately struggle when it comes to securing accommodation after their service careers.

Stable homes offer the ability to benefit multiple aspects of post-military life, including positive domestic relationships, finances and mental health, and can better help insulate service leavers from negative life events. Currently, however, shortage of supply, prohibitive cost, and a lack of awareness all exist as obstacles that for some cannot be negotiated, resulting in immediate homelessness for a number leaving the forces. For others, homelessness occurs in later life but remains equally debilitating. Root causes include alcohol abuse, which this report will identify as being a significant issue within the serving and ex-forces community, irregular employment, and an inability to adjust to civilian life.¹²⁷

Thankfully, the proportion of service personnel who do end up homeless is small, with some estimates suggesting that the number of ex-UK Armed Forces personnel who are homeless is around six per cent of the non-statutory (single) homeless population.¹²⁸ However, despite the small number, this figure still represents a failure to achieve the goals and obligations laid out in the Armed Forces Covenant.

¹²⁷ For example, see Milroy H, Doctoral Thesis: *Pathways to the Street for Ex-Service Personnel; An Examination of Various Routes to Homelessness for Ex-Service Personnel*, University of East Anglia, 2001

¹²⁸ Johnsen S et al, *The Experience of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London*, York: Centre for Housing Policy, 2008

2.1 Homelessness

The problems with housing, and the lack of a stable, safe environment, can have a detrimental effect on the social, domestic, and professional lives of many veterans. Not having a permanent address to return to can make the re-settlement process extremely difficult by preventing foundation steps such as securing a bank account or a job.

The CSJ has learned that when many service personnel leave the military, without their own accommodation they return “home” to the areas in which they grew up, which for the most vulnerable minority are often characterised by social and economic poverty. It was these areas that many chose to leave in order to try and escape social deprivation and unemployment, and whilst in the military managed to do so. But it is too often these areas to which they return for lack of an alternative when already managing the difficult process of transition.

Where these service leavers have left chaotic family backgrounds or broken homes – and in one study 39 per cent of homeless military veterans had¹²⁹ – they often move between friends and family. Such “sofa surfing” is not envisioned to be permanent, but merely a stop-gap until permanent accommodation can be secured. As outlined above, however, such a step can be difficult, and those who are unable to find their own housing become homeless when the arrangements with friends and family inevitably end. This can be due to relationship breakdown, overcrowding, or outstaying their welcome – the latter being particularly common for those suffering alcohol misuse problems. Such outcomes are also major drivers of homelessness amongst the civilian population, with 74 per cent of respondents to a 2008 study listing these as the major causes of their homelessness.¹³⁰

In addition, the lack of a stable home environment can prevent the full integration of the former service person, and an inability to settle following discharge from the military and find employment can result in homelessness. In a 2005 study, it was found that nearly a quarter of all ex-service personnel interviewed attributed their discharge from the Armed Forces as being the primary reason for their homelessness, and that 42 per cent had been unemployed for the previous 12 months.¹³¹

Regardless of why it happens, entering such a state can be daunting. Dave, who served in the Army for 20 years, went to stay with his sister after he was discharged, but soon had to move out again. He turned to SPACES, a specific centre for single service leavers that is part of the Riverside social housing group based in Catterick. He told the CSJ:

‘The thought of being on the streets... I’ve been in warzones, but that’s easy in comparison. If I didn’t find this place, I’d be on the streets. It’s a scary place to be.’

¹²⁹ Dandeker C et al, *Feasibility study on the extent, causes, impact and costs of rough sleeping and homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in a sample of local authorities in England*, London: Kings Centre for Military Health Research, 2005

¹³⁰ Quilgars D et al, *Youth Homelessness in the UK: A decade of progress?*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

¹³¹ Dandeker T et al, *Feasibility study on the extent, causes, impact and costs of rough sleeping and homelessness amongst ex-Service personnel in a sample of local authorities in England*, London: Kings Centre for Military Health Research, 2005

The homeless ex-forces population of the UK once was high, but fortunately it has fallen significantly in recent years. The proportion of veterans among London's single homeless population is estimated to have fallen from above 20 per cent in the mid to late 1990s, down to six per cent in 2008.¹³² Dr Hugh Milroy, CEO of the charity Veteran's Aid, told the CSJ that in his experience the figure could be around half



of that and closer to three per cent.¹³³ In terms of the number of ex-service personnel, this is a reduction from an estimate of between 3,000 and 4,000 down to approximately 1,100. This has been attributed to a combination of reduced output from the Armed Forces, improved Ministry of Defence (MoD) resettlement provision and better intervention from ex-Service charities.¹³⁴

Homelessness in former Armed Forces personnel is bound up in several complex and interlocking features. Issues such as financial difficulties, alcohol abuse, mental health, and domestic and family breakdown all contribute to homelessness as well as being consequences of it. For example, the Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness found that the homeless who had previously served in the Armed Forces were more likely to misuse alcohol than those who had not.¹³⁵

Case study: Larry's story¹³⁶

Larry is 44 years old and from the Middlesbrough area. His childhood relationship with his mother proved to be very problematic and the result was that Larry spent most of this time in care. During this time, Larry got himself into occasional trouble with the police, and in order to resolve this, he decided to change his lifestyle and join the Army. At the age of 18, Larry joined the Green Howards and spent 4 years in the Army but this did not resolve his destructive behaviour.

After leaving the Army, Larry did not have a family to support him and therefore spent a great deal of time homeless and in prison for alcohol related issues and for possession of various weapons. This offending history and his alcohol issues have made it difficult for Larry to find sustainable work on his release.

Since this time, Larry has remained in the Middlesbrough area and after a recent spell in prison he was given probation and ordered to stay in a local probation hostel. This provided a rare period of stability. He registered on the Veterans' Pathway Programme at Finchale Training College in Durham, with an aim of getting support with his alcohol issues, help to find new accommodation outside of the Middlesbrough area and support in looking for training or employment when this was suitable.

¹³² Johnsen S et al, *The Experience of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London*, York: Centre for Housing Policy, 2008

¹³³ The Daily Telegraph, *Life on Civy Street: Veteran problem is overstated, says charity*, 19 December 2012

¹³⁴ Johnsen S et al, *The Experience of Homeless Ex-Service Personnel in London*, York: Centre for Housing Policy, 2008; British Legion, *Literature review: UK veterans and homelessness*, [accessed via: http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/31582/LitRev_UKVetsHomelessness.pdf (20/03/14)]

¹³⁵ Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness, *Statement on the outcomes of the research project "The experiences of homeless ex-service personnel in London"*, York: Ex-Service Action Group on Homelessness, 2008

¹³⁶ Case study provided by Finchale College, Durham. Name has been changed

Homelessness is both a consequence of, and on-going contributory factor to, poor transitions. Any solutions to dealing with homelessness amongst service leavers by securing stable accommodation for them, and where necessary their families, therefore requires an approach that tackles all of these issues concurrently rather than individually. Shelter alone, whilst important, is not enough.

The model of 'moving from welfare to well-being,' as proposed by Hugh Milroy and Veteran's Aid is an important example of what can be achieved. Based in London, Veteran's Aid offer a fully integrated approach that engages with the root issues of homelessness, providing accommodation whilst also arranging for training courses, counselling, or resolving any other issue, such as alcohol abuse, to ensure the future social integration of the veteran. Their programme of proactive intervention coupled with long-term commitment and support is designed to not only get veterans into housing, but into sustainable, long-term employment, and has enjoyed great success. The CSJ applauds this effective model and recommends its adoption for other charities engaged in all aspects of this often complicated transition experience.

As Hugh Milroy told the CSJ, homelessness amongst ex-Armed Forces personnel is often triggered by a negative life event some time after they have left the military, such as losing their job, a sudden bereavement, or going through family breakdown. The real and tangible impact of homelessness, however, is devastating and can result in irrevocable damage.

Given these difficulties in securing accommodation, several organisations exist to provide accommodation soon after the point of separation from the Armed Forces. St Peter's Court in Durham, part of Single Homelessness Action Initiative in Derwentside (SHAID), similarly provides such a service. It is an ex-service personnel specific programme that provides stable accommodation for servicemen and women who would otherwise be homeless, regardless of their date of discharge. Whilst in this stable environment, St Peter's Court is able to provide an opportunity for its clients to tackle the various issues that are both causes and consequences of their homelessness, such as alcohol abuse or mental health issues. This is essential for facilitating the social and economic re-integration of the veteran, which is the end-goal of the project. As Tony Hammond, the project manager, told the CSJ, 'accommodation alone isn't enough.' Significantly, St Peter's Court also acts as a hub to link the service leaver up with local, civilian services that they otherwise would be unaware of, or unable to access. As Hammond pointed out, often all it takes is for the service leaver to be pointed towards them. This should be the role of an Armed Forces champion, who should also prevent any service personnel from reaching such dire straits, which once again shows how the envisioned Covenant is failing at a grassroots level. By-passing these services, and resorting only to military charities, would not, in Hammond's opinion, help the ex-service personnel re-integrate into civilian life, but rather perpetuate the concept of an Armed Forces/civilian cultural divide that would be detrimental over the long-term.

While there are no limits placed on how long clients can use the facilities for, the aim is to move them on into independent living through helping them to access training in order to secure employment, counselling for issues such as alcohol abuse, or secure their own accommodation. Hammond told the CSJ that St Peter's Court enjoys a 100 per cent

success rate in securing accommodation for formerly homeless veterans once they leave, placing them in a mixture of social housing and privately rented properties. Significantly, a stable environment also provides an opportunity to either make or resolve benefits claims, undertake courses and enrol in further education at local colleges, all of which are designed to get the veterans into long-term, sustainable employment. This has included making links with large-scale local employers, such as Nissan and Durham University, and the project enjoys a 60 per cent success rate in getting its clients into sustainable work.

Case study: Johnno's story

Johnno served in the British Army for seven years, and completed two tours of Afghanistan in the Infantry. He joined straight from school having always wanted to serve, like his father had done. He was discharged from the Army via the Military Corrective Training Centre, where he was able to take courses in how to become a personal training instructor. As he had gone through the Military and Corrective Training Centre (MCTC), he was unable to access any of the support usually offered to service personnel when going through resettlement that he had otherwise earned.

Unfortunately, he was not able to complete the course before leaving the MCTC and the Army, after which point he was unable to continue. With no home of his own and nowhere else to go he returned to where his family are from in the North West, but struggled to find a job, as he told the CSJ:

'When you join up, you don't think about what you're going to do after. You think you'll be there for life. Then when you do get out, you think you'll just leave and get a job, but it's not that easy. You end up sitting around, twiddling your thumbs.'

Part of this problem came in relating what he had learned in the military to civilian employers: 'What are you going to put on your CV? "Two tours in Afghanistan." That doesn't mean anything to civvies.'

Civilian life was hard for Johnno: 'My dad was in the Army, I was in the Army... it's all I've ever known.' He was unable to find a permanent place to live, and soon became homeless.

He was referred to St Peter's Court, a specific unit of the Single Homelessness Action Initiative in Derwentside (SHAID) in Durham. St Peter's Court provides sheltered accommodation for ex-service personnel. With the help of staff there, he was able to access the benefits he was entitled to, such as housing and unemployment benefit, as well as complete the physical training course, and is now looking forward to getting back into work.

Becoming homeless was not a deliberate choice, but it was a consequence of several other conflicting factors in his transition that rapidly became a reality. As Johnno said, 'No-one thinks they're going to end up living in a hostel, do they?'

St Peter's Court aims to enable the veterans to take control of their own futures. The self-contained flats are all metered individually with key meters, and it is the client's responsibility to ensure that these are topped up to sustain electricity supply. Hammond identified this small measure to the CSJ as being a simple but important step in building the independence that the clients would need when they eventually moved on to their own accommodation. However, Hammond notes that the model employed by St Peter's Court cannot always be successful. He told the CSJ that:

'You can't help everybody if they don't want to be helped. With the best will in the world, unless they want to do it themselves, then they aren't going to do it.'

Regardless, such a methodology is essential in facilitating a successful social and economic integration for those ex-forces personnel who have otherwise been excluded.

2.2 Housing

In 2012, 35 per cent of Armed Forces personnel surveyed said that finding decent housing was an issue when it came to going through the transition process, and was the third most common concern ahead of leaving the Armed Forces.¹³⁷

The issue of housing affects not only service leavers and veterans, but also their partners and dependents. However, the severity of the issue varies across the branches of the Armed Forces. According to the Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FAMCAS), the majority of Army families (54 per cent) do not own their own home, a four per cent increase on 2012, whereas for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force the figures are 25 and 34 per cent respectively.¹³⁸ These families will have to find housing after the serving spouse is discharged from the military.

A 2007 report stated that the Ministry of Defence 'could, however, improve awareness of the support available' in terms of housing or accommodation¹³⁹ for service leavers, and the MoD has moved to provide this. The Joint Services Housing Advice Office (JSHAO) delivers briefings to serving personnel and their spouses about Local Authority and Housing Association housing opportunities, low-cost home ownership schemes, house purchase, private rental, and guidance on homelessness. They also produce a useful monthly magazine, *Housing Matters*, covering information on renting and buying houses.

However, the reach of the JSHAO is limited, and it is constrained by its small size. The briefings offered are not mandatory, and take up is limited. In a 2007 survey the National Audit Office found that only 12 per cent of respondents to their survey had actually attended a briefing.¹⁴⁰

However, the enforced redundancies as part of the SDSR has crystallised the issue of housing, and in 2012, the JSHAO received 8,856 phone calls at an average of 34 a day, a 45.44 per cent increase on 2011. In addition, they received more than 60 emails a month.¹⁴¹

One of the major areas of the Armed Forces Covenant was that members of the Armed Forces should be able to receive special dispensation when applying for social housing. It states that: 'Members of the Armed Forces Community should have the same access to social housing

¹³⁷ Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012, p55

¹³⁸ Defence Analytical Services and Advice, *Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2013*, London: Defence Analytical Services and Advice, 2013, Section 1: Housing [accessed via [http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&thiscontent=680&date=2013-09-05&pubType=0&PublishTime=09:30:00&from=home&tabOption=1\(12/09/2013\)](http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&thiscontent=680&date=2013-09-05&pubType=0&PublishTime=09:30:00&from=home&tabOption=1(12/09/2013))]

¹³⁹ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007, p6

¹⁴⁰ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services*, London: House of Commons, 2007, p24

¹⁴¹ Joint Service Housing Advice Office, *Annual Report 2012*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2012

and other housing schemes as any other citizen, and not be disadvantaged in that respect by the requirement for mobility whilst in Service.¹⁴² In theory, therefore, service leavers are able to navigate the requirement to have a local connection when applying for social housing that would otherwise exclude them, giving them a greater freedom in their choice of where to live.

Yet those responsible for delivering these services, and supplying this information, have highlighted that a problem still exists. The CSJ has learned from charities that there is a real lack of understanding about the housing process amongst service leavers. Too many service leavers, when faced with transition, assume that they will simply be given a council house by the local authority of the area they choose to move to on the day of their discharge. This assumption is both false and harmful. Cat Calder, the Housing Specialist at the Army Families Federation, told the CSJ that:

'The MOD produce a DIN [Defence Instructions and Notices] which contains all the information service personnel need to know about redundancy. However, this is a lengthy and wordy document which many may not read fully or understand. The MoD also have briefings for those affected by redundancy and the Army Families Federation would urge all service personnel to attend these and to ask questions of the Army Redundancy Cell if they are at all unsure on any aspect of the process. Service leavers need to have understood all the information in order to ensure that they have as smooth a transition as possible to civilian life.'

Securing a council house remains a far more complicated process than the majority of service personnel appreciate. Whilst veterans receive additional points when applying for social housing as part of the Armed Forces and Community Covenants to help prevent them from being unfairly disadvantaged as a result of military service, because many of those leaving are young, single and otherwise fit and healthy, they will automatically be low on the list of priority. Any extra points they receive for military service will still not result in them being moved to the top of waiting lists. This is not something that is necessarily taken into account.

With five million people on social housing waiting lists in England alone,¹⁴³ there is a major shortage meaning that, no matter how much veterans are prioritised, they will not get a property immediately after they leave. This problem has been identified by MPs from across the political spectrum. As Sir Bob Russell MP told the CSJ, housing, not just for ex-servicemen and women and their families, but for civilians as well, is 'a major issue in its entirety. We have to accept that it's a problem.' He also identified another problem, that while the Armed Forces Covenant exists to ensure that servicemen are not unfairly disadvantaged, it does not exist to excessively advantage them. As such:

'We simply need to build more homes, and the failure of successive governments over the last 30 years to build more social housing has created the problem we're seeing now. We mustn't allow an Army family to miss out on a home, but at the same time we shouldn't let them be unfairly advantaged. We need sufficient housing for all.'

¹⁴² Ministry of Defence, *The Armed Forces Covenant*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2011

¹⁴³ Speech by Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, CIH Housing Conference, 13 June 2012

In addition, the equality legislation in Northern Ireland passed as part of the Good Friday Agreement means that no group can be prioritised or discriminated against. This means that service leavers cannot be prioritised over ordinary citizens as the Armed Forces Covenant intended in order for them to overcome disadvantage, or receive any form of special treatment in the delivery of services. This aspect of the Armed Forces Covenant, indeed the whole Covenant itself, is completely inapplicable, and as such the housing situation in Northern Ireland is far worse than in England, Wales or Scotland.

2.3 Home ownership

The extent of home ownership in the Armed Forces varies across the different branches, and is influenced by strategic and operational function. The movement patterns of Army personnel in particular was a significant factor in also reducing plans to buy a home – 92 per cent expected their partner or spouse to be posted overseas to an area where they did not want to buy a home, 66 per cent wanted to be able to move with a spouse or partner when they were relocated, and 75 per cent stated that they did not want to buy a home where they were currently based.¹⁴⁴ This may influence the fact that only 19 per cent lived in their own home during the working week.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the desire for home ownership remains high across the Armed Forces. Indeed, 86 per cent of Army respondents answered “No” to the question ‘I/we don’t want to own a home at this stage in my/our life/career(s).’¹⁴⁶ While only 30 per cent of service families lived in a privately owned home (although this figure was highest amongst the Royal Navy at 57 per cent), 53 per cent said that it was their desired choice.¹⁴⁷ A further 25 per cent stated that they were not currently living in their own home but would prefer to do so.¹⁴⁸

The main barrier to securing these living arrangements was cost, with 61 per cent of Armed Forces families stating that they could not afford a home.¹⁴⁹ One aspect preventing service personnel and their families securing their own home can be negative credit ratings. Due to the needs of service life, with frequent re-locating or overseas deployments lasting several months, service personnel can be at a severe disadvantage when it comes to securing credit. Indeed, 27 per cent of serviceman said that they had been refused a mortgage loan or credit card, the highest rate being 33 per cent of the lower ranks of the Army.¹⁵⁰

Financial fluidity is also an issue amongst former service personnel. Under the current system, the first pension payment or separation lump sum the ex-service person receives comes through after the last day of service, or even up to 35 days after that. Even those who have

¹⁴⁴ Defence Analytical Services and Advice, *Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2013*, London: Defence Analytical Services and Advice, 2013, Section 1: Housing [accessed via <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&thiscontent=680&date=2013-09-05&pubType=0&PublishTime=09:30:00&from=home&tabOption=1> (12/09/2013)]

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ Lord Ashcroft, *The Armed Forces & Society: The military in Britain through the eyes of the Service personnel, employers and the public*, London: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2012, p54

saved over long careers still may not possess enough funds to secure a mortgage to buy a property, especially given that many have been turned down by major lenders. As a former squadron leader told the CSJ:

'I was amazed that the banks do not market a product or financial package for a former serviceman like me. I was initially rejected for a mortgage by my own bank, with whom I have been with for 30 years.'

As such, unless they have substantial savings to fall back on, the vast majority of service personnel are not in possession of a great deal of funds when they leave the Armed Forces, and financial fluidity, necessary for a deposit on a house or for rent, is severely constricted. Those leaving the Armed Forces after a shorter period of time, or through the rapid process associated with Administrative Discharge, are far less likely to have been able to accomplish this. The result is that the service leaver will most likely either head back to his family or to a friend's in the short-term, a potentially disruptive influence on a successful resettlement.

An international comparison: service accommodation in Australia

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has utilised a unique plan to help integrate its forces into the local civilian community better. Rather than house its members on military bases, as is the norm in the United Kingdom, Canada and elsewhere, in Australia their service personnel rent or own homes in the local community. As such, they are fully integrated into civilian society, commute to work like any other employed person, and are given a greater level of independence, including managing their own budgets. Authorities in Australia believed that this not only helps improve financial competency but also delivers a more effective service person overall, but also means that the service personnel and their families are able to draw on the local community for support, rather than being isolated. It also helps bridge the gap between the military and civilians, ensuring a productive cultural exchange that prevents any misconceptions developing about who or what a service person is.

This was a decision integrated by the ADF. It was decided that quality housing was an essential part of their employment model, and an important factor in both recruitment and retention. The ADF therefore sourced a private company to build high-quality housing, which was then leased back to the ADF, who subsidise the accommodation for their members. The ongoing financial commitments of maintaining service accommodation were instead diverted into building quality housing that could then be rented out to the service personnel, who paid the ADF close to market rate, helping to offset the cost.

2.4 Help to Buy: The Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces home ownership

In order to encourage higher rates of home ownership amongst members of the Armed Forces, the MoD previously offered the Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP), an interest-free loan of up to £8,500 which was available to all serving military personnel with four years service who wish to purchase a property in the UK. Its stated aim was to 'assist eligible personnel to enter the UK housing market.'¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Defence, *JSP 752: Tri Service Regulations for Allowances, Version 10.2*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2009, Chapter 2, Section 4

The repayment terms were worked out according to the length of time the soldier expects to be serving for. The typical lifespan of the loan was 10 years, paying back normally 10 per cent per year, beginning two years after taking the loan. Taking the full £8,500 loan would therefore have resulted in repayments of around £75 per month.

However, while the loan was interest free, any amount over £5000 attracted a tax liability from the Inland Revenue who regarded it as a beneficial loan. In addition, according to regulations, Termination of service – or leaving the military – was not normally allowed if any amount of the LSAP was outstanding unless arrangements had been made to repay it in full by the time the service person had left the military during their 12-month notice period. As such, the possibility of being locked into the Armed Forces due to taking the loan put many people off, as it was a considerable long-term commitment.

Many problems prevented the successful uptake of the LSAP. These included the mobility of service personnel that prevented them buying a property in a fixed location that they may only inhabit for as little as two years. Also, the fact that the Armed Forces offers accommodation to its members, meant that it was cheaper for service personnel to live in these quarters rather than take on the loan as a debt that they may have struggled to pay off. Financial literacy was, and remains, an issue for large numbers of service personnel. While extensive advice was available on the LSAP loan, it was up to individuals to manage their own financial affairs and it was their legal responsibility to ensure that it was paid back. A lack of financial confidence and literacy therefore served to prevent take up. Efforts are currently being made to redress this, with various schemes being launched such as Money Force in March 2013.

A problem in recognition of the LSAP also limited access to it; despite efforts to publicise the scheme, 26 per cent of Armed Forces families did not know about either this or the other forms of support available to them in 2013.¹⁵² This figure is higher than it was in 2012 or 2011.

As a result of these limitations, applications for the LSAP have been low over the past four years. Between June 2009 and June 2013, 9,689 applied for the LSAP, and of these 83.84 per cent were for the full amount.¹⁵³ Between June 2009 and July 2013, 82,290 personnel had left the Armed Forces, meaning that use of the LSAP is a mere 11.8 per cent.

In September 2013 the MoD announced the Forces Help to Buy scheme.¹⁵⁴ Beginning on 1 April 2014, the scheme provides an option for service personnel to borrow up to 50 per cent of their salary interest free, up to a maximum amount of £25,000, to buy their first home, and will replace the LSAP. The CSJ welcomes this new plan to help improve home ownership amongst the Armed Forces, though notes with caution that as it only applies to serving personnel, those who only serve for a short period of time will be unable to take full advantage and as such it will fail to resolve many of the issues that the CSJ have encountered in this area.

¹⁵² Defence Analytical Services and Advice, *Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2013*, London: Defence Analytical Services and Advice, 2013, Section 1: Housing [accessed via <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&thiscontent=680&date=2013-09-05&pubType=0&PublishTime=09:30:00&from=home&tabOption=1> (12/09/2013)]

¹⁵³ Freedom of Information Request to the Ministry of Defence, Reference 06-09-2013-141546-005.

¹⁵⁴ Ministry of Defence, Press Release, *New housing scheme for Service personnel*, 28 September 2013 [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-housing-scheme-for-service-personnel> (02/10/13)]

For the future, the issue of home ownership is being addressed as part of the MoD's New Employment Model (NEM) work. The NEM Programme is the most thorough review of Service personnel terms and conditions of service in a generation. It covers four broad areas of policy: Terms of Service; Accommodation; Training and Education; and Value and Reward. The NEM is focusing on supporting lifestyle choice and improving domestic stability and as such offers a unique opportunity to address wider housing and home ownership issues.¹⁵⁵

2.5 Conclusion

The CSJ has identified that, despite the provisions and the entitlement laid down in the Armed Forces Covenant, these services are not being delivered at a grassroots level, resulting in homelessness amongst some personnel leaving the Armed Forces. Homelessness is one consequence of a lack of employment, issues of addiction, or criminality, which can result in homelessness and a negative cycle from which it can be difficult to break.

Housing, home ownership and the issue of accommodation is a major issue affecting both the British Armed Forces and wider society. The MoD's NEM Programme offers an important opportunity to address many of the home ownership concerns being faced by servicemen and women. However, in this the Armed Forces can be disadvantaged due to service experience, but in particular pre-existing social and economic background. For some, this can result in homelessness immediately after discharge from the military. For others, homelessness is the result of a downward spiral driven by the cumulative adverse effects of alcohol consumption, poor mental health or relationship breakdown.

The importance of a stable, safe environment cannot be underestimated, and has immeasurable impacts on other issues such as family breakdown and mental health.

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Defence, *New Employment Model* [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/new-employment-model> (20/01/14)]

chapter three

Alcohol and drug use

The ways in which substance abuse and addiction can destroy lives and trap people in poverty has been highlighted previously by the CSJ.¹⁵⁶ Such outcomes can also affect those who have served in the UK Armed Forces. However, whereas the UK is afflicted by some of the highest drug use in Europe,¹⁵⁷ the same cannot be said of the British military. There, a robust anti-drug policy and heavy disciplinary action if caught has resulted in extremely low use, far below the national average. Yet a problem still exists; in the military the major problem substance is alcohol.

Alcohol use is a social norm in the UK as a whole, and has grown in recent decades. In the past 60 years, the average intake of alcohol per person in the UK has risen steadily, from five litres a year in the 1950s to over 11 litres a year in 2007.¹⁵⁸ The true extent of alcohol consumption may indeed be far worse than stated, as some research has shown that respondents typically underestimate the amount they drink when it comes to completing surveys.¹⁵⁹

However, alcohol use within the military far exceeds that seen in wider society, and alcohol related harm and dependence is greater in the military than in civilian society.¹⁶⁰ Such behaviour can set patterns of behaviour that endure into post-military life. This can, and does, prove problematic for some former service personnel, resulting in poor outcomes. Alcohol misuse is linked to a wide range of mental and physical health problems, including accidents, injuries, poisoning, cancer, mental illness, alcohol dependence and liver disease. The frequency with which alcohol is abused by military personnel risks causing long-term damage to the physical and mental health of service leavers for decades after the leave the military.

¹⁵⁶ Centre for Social Justice, *No Quick Fix: Exposing the depth of Britain's drug and alcohol problem*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Alcohol Concern, *Making alcohol a health priority: Opportunities to reduce alcohol harms and rising costs*, London: Alcohol Concern, 2011 (accessed via <http://www.drugscope.org.uk/Resources/Drugscope/Documents/PDF/virtuallibrary/Making%20alcohol%20a%20health%20priority.pdf> (14/09/13))

¹⁵⁹ Bellis M, *Off Measure: How we Underestimate the Amount we Drink*, London: Alcohol Concern, 2009

¹⁶⁰ Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

3.1 The role of alcohol in the Armed Forces

'Alcohol has been part of military life since well before the formation of the units that now make up the British Army.'¹⁶¹

The Armed Forces have a complex and contradictory attitude to alcohol. Whilst on the one hand, alcohol plays a positive role in military cultures, helping with social bonding that is essential in building and maintaining an effective fighting force, such consumption can be taken to excess:

*'Although alcohol has always played a significant role in military life, the harm caused by heavy and sustained consumption is now well known. Excessive alcohol use may mask existing mental health problems, lead to dependence and is associated with violence and criminal activity.'*¹⁶²

The British military, particularly the Army, has created this complicated and confusing relationship. For example, 'the Army's message is not "anti-alcohol" and does recognise that moderate use of alcohol has a social function.'¹⁶³ However, according to the Army, 'binge drinkers are an unacceptable nuisance and a liability'¹⁶⁴ and according to the Army's own guidelines on alcohol and drugs, 75 per cent of violent offences in the Army are alcohol related.¹⁶⁵ Professor Simon Wessely also told the CSJ that 80 per cent of courts martial are due to alcohol-fuelled infractions.

There are several reasons why alcohol consumption is so high in the Armed Forces:

- **Recruitment:** Recruitment in the Armed Forces is weighted towards young, single males, many of whom come from socially and economically deprived backgrounds. Such groups are those that comprise the highest consumers of alcohol within civilian society, and commensurately within the Armed Forces.¹⁶⁶
- **Group bonding:** Camaraderie and group bonding are essential in the military, but are situations that encourage higher alcohol consumption levels.¹⁶⁷
- **Operational deployments:** The mental strain that follows an operational deployment can, according to research, increase alcohol consumption. Troops returning from an operational theatre are 22% more likely to have an alcohol problem than those who have not been

¹⁶¹ British Army, *Alcohol and Drugs: The Facts*, Upavon: British Army, 2003

¹⁶² Fossey M, *Across the Wire: Veterans, Mental Health and Vulnerability*, London: Centre for Mental Health, 2010

¹⁶³ British Army, *Alcohol and Drugs: The Facts*, Upavon: British Army, 2003

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

¹⁶⁶ Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

¹⁶⁷ Ministry of Defence, Press Release, *Shedding light on mental health in the forces*, 16 July 2010 [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/shedding-light-on-mental-health-in-the-forces> (07/10/13)]

deployed,¹⁶⁸ and the Ministry of Defence has acknowledged that 'alcohol misuse is a serious problem and increased use is associated with operational deployment.'¹⁶⁹

Whilst the Army's guidelines highlight the negative effects of alcohol on psychological and physical health, and also have a list of key indicators to show if a soldier has a problem,¹⁷⁰ the widespread role of alcohol as a form of informal operational decompression across the Armed Forces may be a root cause of this problem, and establish a relationship with alcohol that is then difficult to break in later years.

Yet while there is a response to severe problems that occur as a result of drinking, alcohol consumption and misuse itself do not attract the same level of disciplinary response from the military authorities. Alcohol is not treated with the same severity as other drugs by the British Armed Forces, and is not included in Compulsory Drug Testing (CDT), the failure of which involves immediate transfer to the Military Training and Corrective Centre (MTCT) usually followed by discharge from the military. Whilst disciplinary action can be taken for excessive alcohol use,¹⁷¹ it rarely is due to the culture of the military that does not perceive alcohol consumption to be a problem.

As such, alcohol is a drug that can be abused without resulting in the same levels of disciplinary action or negatively impact the career of service personnel in the same way. When speaking to the CSJ, Professor Greenberg was keen to stress that while the abuse of alcohol amongst the military is far higher than amongst their civilian counterparts, rates of abuse of drugs such as cannabis are far lower, due to the deterrent of CDT.

Whilst the Army's guidelines highlight the negative effects of alcohol on psychological and physical health, and also have a list of key indicators to show if a soldier has a problem,¹⁷² the widespread role of alcohol in an informal operational debriefing capacity across the Armed Forces may well be a root cause of this problem, and establish a relationship with alcohol that is then difficult to break in later years.

3.2 Levels of alcohol consumption in the Armed Forces

Research published by King's College London in 2007 found hazardous drinking amongst 67 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women in the British Armed Forces, far higher rates than those found in their civilian counterparts of 38 and 16 per cent for men and women respectively.¹⁷³ It is also important to identify that alcohol misuse is not merely a problem that is confined to the Army; the Royal Navy likewise exhibits such rates amongst its personnel, with binge drinking significantly more prevalent than in civilian society.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Ministry of Defence, evidence to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee inquiry into services for Armed Forces veterans in Wales, 2011 [accessed via <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmwelaf/writev/sfv/sfv04.htm> (04/10/13)]

¹⁷⁰ British Army, *Alcohol and Drugs: The Facts*, Upavon: British Army, 2003

¹⁷¹ House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties*, London: House of Commons, 2011

¹⁷² British Army, *Alcohol and Drugs: The Facts*, Upavon: British Army, 2003

¹⁷³ Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

¹⁷⁴ Henderson A et al, 'Alcohol Misuse in the Royal Navy', *Occupational Medicine*, Vol. 59, 2009, pp25–31



Harmful levels of drinking can be assessed via the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C) questionnaire. The AUDIT questionnaire is a simple ten-question test that was developed by the World Health Organization to determine if a person's alcohol consumption may be harmful, and is used internationally.

King's College use a score of 16 as being indicative of a severe drinking problem in the context of the British military. In British society, 6 per cent of the male civilian population record a score of 16 or above. In contrast, in the military the score is 16 per cent amongst all men, and greater than 30 per cent for those under 25. As such, service in the Armed Forces is clearly associated with higher, and potentially dangerous, alcohol consumption.

This problem is exhibited across the three branches of the Armed Forces. For example, a study of 1,559 Royal Navy personnel showed that 92 per cent scored as hazardous drinkers on the AUDIT-C questionnaire, while 40 per cent met criteria for heavy drinking and 15 per cent were problem drinkers, rates all far higher than in age matched civilian samples.¹⁷⁵

The pattern of consumption is also significant. Professor Simon Wessely told the CSJ that alcohol dependency rates amongst those currently serving in the Army, particularly those who are deployed, are extremely low. This is because, for the past decade, British troops have been deployed regularly on six-month tours of Afghanistan and Iraq. Alcohol is strictly prohibited on these tours, and as such alcohol dependency cannot exist; the ability to go six months without consuming proves a lack of dependency. However, binge drinking for those troops not on operational deployment, particularly at weekends, is extensive and a substantial problem that is insufficiently addressed.

3.3 The impact of active military service on alcohol consumption

'Studies have shown that military personnel, and particularly those in high-risk roles, drink excessively.'¹⁷⁶

While military service does not necessarily encourage binge drinking, military service can be seen to be a direct cause of alcohol misuse.

Deployment, for example, can have a noticeable impact on alcohol consumption, with one study showing that amongst British troops, those in particular who had served in Bosnia

¹⁷⁵ Henderson A et al, 'Alcohol misuse in the Royal Navy', *Occupational Medicine*, Vol. 59, 2009, pp25–31

¹⁷⁶ Jones E et al, 'Alcohol use and misuse in the military: A review', *International Review of Psychiatry*, Vol. 23, April 2011

exhibited a far higher percentage of heavy alcohol consumption in comparison to those who had not been deployed.¹⁷⁷ It is important to note that those who had served in Bosnia were more at risk of heavy drinking at the time that the questionnaire was completed than those who had served in the Gulf due the specific nature of operations there as they were deployed in a peacekeeping role. Peacekeeping, as previously experienced by British troops in Northern Ireland, has been shown to have strong association with increased alcohol consumption in previous medical research.¹⁷⁸ Peacekeepers are exposed to all of the stresses of regular combat operations, but they are far more limited in how they respond. Alcohol is one available outlet for this.

In terms of more recent conflicts, a 2010 investigation of UK troops deployed to Afghanistan and/or Iraq found that military personnel were more likely to report alcohol misuse after deployment than their colleagues who had not been deployed.¹⁷⁹

The impact of operational deployment on alcohol consumption is not limited purely to British forces. A study of 1,424 Australian veterans of the 1991 Gulf War showed that alcohol abuse was the most common psychological disorder ten years after the event.¹⁸⁰

While 72.2 per cent of those in one British study who were classed as heavy drinkers were still in the military, 27.8 per cent of heavy drinkers had left the military were continuing their behaviour in the civilian environment – a significant portion.¹⁸¹ Previous studies have commented that the most vulnerable service leavers, those more likely to struggle in resettlement and re-integration, are most at risk of heavy drinking which extends into after-service life, and alcohol dependence was one of the most common diagnoses in a recent study of UK veterans.¹⁸²

Amongst 9,990 UK service personnel surveyed in 2010, a significant trend amongst those who self-reported alcohol misuse was previous deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, with the misuse taking place on the return from the theatre of operations. Alcohol misuse was greatest amongst those who had been deployed in a combat role, and had been at greatest risk of being killed or injured. 22.5 per cent of those who had been deployed in such roles reported alcohol misuse, versus 10.9 per cent of those who had not been deployed – more than double.¹⁸³

177 Iversen A et al, 'Factors associated with heavy alcohol consumption in the UK Armed Forces: Data from a health survey of Gulf, Bosnia and era veterans', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 172, September 2007, pp956–61

178 Mehlum L, 'Alcohol and Stress in Norwegian United Nations Peacekeepers', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 164, 1999, pp720–4

179 Fear N et al, 'What are the Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces? A Cohort Study', *Lancet*, Vol. 375, 2010, pp1783–1797

180 Ikin J et al, 'War-Related Psychological Stressors and Risk of Psychological Disorders in Australian Veterans of the 1991 Gulf War', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 185, 2004, pp116–126

181 Iversen A et al, 'Factors associated with heavy alcohol consumption in the UK Armed Forces: Data from a health survey of Gulf, Bosnia and era veterans', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 172, September 2007, pp956–61

182 Iversen A et al, '“Goodbye and good luck”: the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol. 186, 2005, p480–6

183 Fear N et al, 'What are the Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces? A Cohort Study', *Lancet*, Vol. 375, 2010, pp1783–1797

There is a general trend for heavy drinkers to have poorer psychological health¹⁸⁴ – whether this is a consequence or a cause has not yet been fully established, and research is ongoing.

Within those deployed, certain demographic groupings are more prone to alcohol misuse. A large 2007 cross-sectional study of UK Armed Forces who had been deployed in 2003 showed that increased and heavy alcohol consumption was more common amongst younger, lower ranked servicemen, as well as being associated with being single and deployed to Iraq in a combat role. Significantly, having a parent with a drink or drug problem was also found to be an influencing factor on alcohol consumption. Excessive alcohol consumption was also found to be more common in the UK armed forces than in the general population even after taking age and gender differences into account.¹⁸⁵

Service personnel under the age of 25 were also the dominant group in presenting with alcohol misuse issues, with a 2010 study finding that 26 per cent engaged in harmful drinking as compared to an average of 11 per cent across the older age brackets.¹⁸⁶

Cultural practices may also hide or enable those with serious alcohol problems. Since UK military alcohol policy has in the past focussed on intervention based on disciplinary action, rather than treatment, Iversen et al noted that:

*'Stigma is a major reason for service personnel with alcohol and other mental health problems not seeking help in service; therefore, a culture of openness and unambiguous guidance for the chain of command which encourages people to come forward if they are experiencing difficulties is to be encouraged.'*¹⁸⁷

3.4 The Armed Forces' response to high alcohol consumption

The British Armed Forces have made several attempts to improve the relationship between service personnel and alcohol.

Current levels of alcohol consumption are recognised as a major problem by the MoD. A 2004 review highlighted the detrimental effect of a hangover on performance by outlining the health and occupational consequences of impaired functioning that followed the day after a heavy session.¹⁸⁸

For those seeking help with their alcohol consumption, the Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMHs) provide assessment and treatment of personnel presenting with

184 Iversen A et al, 'Factors Associated with Heavy Alcohol Consumption in the UK Armed Forces: Data from a health survey of Gulf, Bosnia and era veterans', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 172, September 2007, pp956–61

185 Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK armed forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

186 Fear N et al, 'What are the Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces? A Cohort Study: Supplementary Web Appendix', *Lancet*, Vol. 375, 2010, pp1783–1797

187 Iversen A et al, 'Factors Associated with Heavy Alcohol Consumption in the UK Armed Forces: Data from a health survey of Gulf, Bosnia and era veterans', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 172, September 2007, pp956–61

188 Barker CT, 'The Alcohol Hangover and its Potential Impact on the UK Armed Forces: A Review of the Literature on Post-Alcohol Impairment', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, Vol. 150, 2004, pp168–74

alcohol problems, along with mental health assessments to try and identify any psychological comorbidity. Treatment consists largely of individual psychotherapeutic approaches, including Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Substance Misuse and relapse prevention through follow-up support. Anti-craving medication is also provided for those that require it. Patients with dependence will have access to community detoxification and a few will be admitted for hospital detoxification. However, not all DCMHs run alcohol treatment programmes, so the potential for this treatment is limited.¹⁸⁹

However, the military prefers a programme of education as a form of early intervention and there are a number of specific alcohol-related education programmes, though the form and content varies across the three branches of the military. The three Royal Navy DCMHs run two alcohol programmes. Individuals can be referred to the one-day Basic Alcohol Education Course by their superiors. If it is deemed necessary by those delivering the course, attendees can also be directed to the Extended Alcohol Education Course, a five-day alcohol education intervention. Similarly, the Army DCMH at Catterick provides a three week alcohol programme, consisting of weekly group sessions followed up with a support group. However, it has been noted that these educational programmes are of limited effect.¹⁹⁰

The impact on operational effectiveness has also been stressed, with the Army stating that drinking 'must not be at the expense of operational capability', and makes it clear that a zero-tolerance policy exists towards conducting 'safety critical duties' whilst having any trace of alcohol in a soldiers' system.¹⁹¹ Similarly, steps have been made to provide alternate spaces for socialising that do not involve alcohol. The RAF has moved to introduce more coffee shops and other alcohol-free meeting places to replicate the social environment away from the mess, as well as providing services to offer counselling for those who believe their alcohol consumption may be too high, though the take-up of these services is not monitored centrally.¹⁹² The RAF also operates random breathalyser tests on its bases to encourage lower consumption.

Challenging behaviour and improving relationships on a substantial scale remains difficult. A 2007 study noted that, globally, there had been 'no convincing evidence for any intervention aimed at an occupational group to reduce harmful drinking'.¹⁹³

There are also few disciplinary responses to excessive drinking, and certainly none on the scale of the CDT policy. For example, in 2008, 2009 and 2010 there were no discharges with alcohol as a contributing factor in either the Army or the Royal Air Force.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, whilst the military's response to drug use is clear, when it comes to alcohol there is no definitive policy. As such, alcohol can be abused without fear of having the same repercussions as other drugs.

¹⁸⁹ House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties*, London: House of Commons, 2011

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ British Army, *Alcohol and Drugs: The Facts*, Upavon: British Army, 2003

¹⁹² Royal Air Force Families Federation, *Health*, [accessed via <http://www.raf-ff.org.uk/health-lifestyle.asp> (07/10/13)]

¹⁹³ Iversen A et al, 'Factors Associated with Heavy Alcohol Consumption in the UK Armed Forces: Data from a health survey of Gulf, Bosnia and era veterans', *Military Medicine*, Vol. 172, September 2007, p960

¹⁹⁴ Freedom of Information Reply Def Pers Sec/FOI:03-10-2013-095000-002, Ministry of Defence, 25 October 2013

The MoD's complicated, conflicted and vague policy towards alcohol consumption was highlighted in a 2011 Defence Select Committee report:

*'It is unclear to us whether the MoD regards the misuse of alcohol and other dangerous risk-taking behaviour as part of a pattern of reprehensible behaviour which requires punishment or discouragement, or a manifestation of stress which requires treatment, or indeed a combination of both. We recognise that the MoD has been trying to tackle the over-consumption of alcohol but there is more that should be done.'*¹⁹⁵

It is true that 'the difficulty of striking an appropriate balance between responsible and harmful drinking goes to the root of military culture.'¹⁹⁶ It is in the interest of the MoD to reduce alcohol intake in order to improve retention, and not lose troops to the effect of alcohol and drug abuse. Regardless, 'alcohol has played such a significant part in service culture for so long that any intervention will take the form of a war of attrition.'¹⁹⁷

3.5 Continuation of alcohol abuse post-discharge

'There is clear evidence that a culture of heavier drinking is well established in Britain's armed forces, and whilst this does not lead to serious problems for most service personnel, a significant minority do experience problems of alcohol misuse and these problems may continue or worsen after discharge from the armed forces.'

Alcohol Concern, *On the Front Line: Alcohol Concern Cymru Briefing*, Cardiff: Alcohol Concern, 2012

Continuing the same level of alcohol consumption post-military service, when no longer in an environment that tolerates such behaviour, can result in problems that make it far harder to successfully resettlement. According to the Forces in Mind Trust, alcohol misuse was the largest single cost of poor transition, with costs of £35 million for service leavers from 2012.¹⁹⁸

Alcohol abuse and harmful levels of consumption have an adverse influence on other issues that prevent a successful social and economic integration, such as crime and mental health. Indeed, a study of the UK military operation in Iraq from 2003 to 2005 found that the most frequent mental health problem encountered by returning UK armed forces personnel was not post-traumatic stress disorder but rather alcohol misuse, along with other more common mental disorders.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties*, London: House of Commons, 2011

¹⁹⁶ Jones E et al, 'Alcohol use and misuse in the military: A review', *International Review of Psychiatry*, Vol. 23, April 2011, p171

¹⁹⁷ Jones E et al, 'Alcohol use and misuse in the military: A review', *International Review of Psychiatry*, Vol. 23, April 2011, p171

¹⁹⁸ Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the Transition Process for Service Personnel Returning to Civilian Life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013, p7

¹⁹⁹ Hotopf M et al, 'The health of UK military personnel who deployed to the 2003 Iraq war: A cohort study', *Lancet*, Vol. 367, 2006, pp1731–1741, and Fear N et al, 'What are the Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces? A Cohort Study', *Lancet*, Vol. 375, 2010, pp1783–1797

Patterns of heavy drinking established whilst serving in the forces can be hard to shake off, and may worsen after service personnel have left the Armed Forces. Former service personnel have told the CSJ how their addictions and problematic relationships with alcohol began in the military. Rob, who has struggled with alcohol addiction in the years since he left the Army, told the CSJ:

'When I joined up, I ended up with a battalion known for heavy drinking. To get in with my battalion, I had to go out drinking. That was the only way I was going to fit in. You drink to get by, to get along.'

Case study: Ian's story

Ian joined the Navy aged 16, and was immediately indoctrinated into the drinking culture, that established patterns of behaviour that were to characterise him for the next 25 years. He told the CSJ: 'That drinking mentality never leaves you. I was 16, 17 when I joined up. The only way I was going to get to know the people on my ship was through going to the bar.'

The amount of alcohol consumed was excessive, with Ian saying that: 'I was pouring my pints on the floor rather than turn them down and risk being socially excluded.' For Ian, the alcohol consumption was an inevitable and indivisible part of service life: 'That's how you socialise.'

The culture of the Royal Navy when Ian was in uniform also meant that drinking, even when reaching problematic levels, was never judged or reported to senior officers, particularly when at sea and confined in a shared space aboard ship: 'You have to live with these people, so you look away and don't turn people in.'

Ian's behaviour in these early years characterised the rest of his life, and led him to become an addict. After alcohol he turned to other drugs. He did not deal with his issues and get clean until 2013: 'The drinking and getting out of your head was there from the beginning, and contributed to my substance abuse. It was party time.'

Now he works as a mentor and counsellor, helping those who are battling the same demons he did. The problems remain exactly the same: 'Everyone has the same story.'

Charities have reported the strong link between alcohol misuse and abuse and subsequent negative social, physical and psychological issues. A survey of those former members of the Armed Forces personnel in contact with Combat Stress found that 20 per cent were drinking at a hazardous level and 27 per cent were considered to be alcohol dependent.²⁰⁰

Such statistics are replicated across the UK. Kevin Laughlin told the CSJ that 30 per cent of those on the Veterans Pathway programme at Finchale College in Durham have admitted to having a problematic relationship with alcohol, which had hindered their ability to reintegrate successfully following their leaving the Armed Forces.

²⁰⁰ Written evidence submitted by All Wales Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Service to Welsh Affairs Select Committee inquiry into services for Armed Forces veterans in Wales, 2011 [accessed via <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmwelaf/writev/sfv/sfv04.htm> (04/10/13)]

The charity Veteran's Aid, based in London, reports alcohol misuse as the primary addiction diagnosis for 63 per cent of their clients in recent years.²⁰¹

Similarly, Surf Action, a charity focused on helping ex-service personnel overcome social and economic issues after leaving the Armed Forces based in Cornwall, told the CSJ that, as of October 2013, 100 per cent of their client base had issues with alcohol of varying severity.

There are some groups who are more vulnerable to alcohol abuse. Younger service personnel are more likely to abuse alcohol,²⁰² and those who leave the Armed Forces after less than four years of service, the Early Service Leavers, are recognised as being amongst those most at risk of social exclusion.²⁰³

The health and social impacts of such alcohol consumption are severe. For example, in 2009 NAPO published a report on the number for former Armed Forces personnel currently on probation and under supervision. Of the 90 case studies sampled from probation offices across the country, 39, or 43 per cent, related to a chronic use of alcohol.²⁰⁴ Alcohol abuse can also be a physical obstacle to seeking help for other issues, such as mental health. Despite alcohol misuse being a symptom of mental ill-health, current NHS treatment services will not engage with any ex-service person experiencing co-morbid mental health problems, such as alcohol use and depression, for example, but will instead target the alcohol specifically. As the two are inextricably linked, such an approach fails to tackle the issue. Instead, a holistic solution, that treats both problems alongside each other, must be found. As such, some service personnel are unwittingly preventing themselves from getting the help that they need.

There is currently no effective support system for those experiencing difficulties with their levels of drinking as part of the transition structure. The patterns of behaviour in relation to alcohol are established within the military, but are currently recognised as severe problems only after an individual has left the military and entered the civilian world where the relationship with alcohol is radically different. Outside of the military, treatment services for alcohol addiction within the NHS are poor,²⁰⁵ forcing many former service personnel to turn to charities for help. However, by this point many are already at rock bottom, with complicit problems such as debt, family breakdown and unemployment as a result of heavy drinking that began in the military and followed them into their civilian lives.

3.6 Other drugs

The abuse of alcohol remains a far more significant factor than other substances in the UK Armed Forces, and this persists into life after uniform. NAPO's report on former members of

201 Veterans' Aid, *Annual Review 2012–13*, London: Veteran's Aid, 2013

202 Fear N et al, 'Patterns of drinking in the UK Armed Forces', *Addiction*, Vol. 102, 2007, pp1749–1759

203 Amongst others, see Alcohol Concern, *On the Front Line: Alcohol Concern Cymru Briefing*, Cardiff: Alcohol Concern, 2012. The CSJ also extensively heard this view in evidence gathering amongst stakeholders and other experts in the field.

204 National Association of Probation Officers, *Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff*, London: NAPO (2009)

205 Centre for Social Justice, *No Quick Fix: Exposing the depth of Britain's drug and alcohol problem*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

the Armed Forces on probation in 2009, for example, found that, in comparison to the figures stated above, drug misuse was a major issue in 14 per cent of cases.²⁰⁶

Even after service, drug use remains low amongst former military personnel, and even then they often involve alcohol. As just one example, 29 per cent of Veteran's Aid's clients admit to polysubstance use (misusing both drugs and alcohol).²⁰⁷

Drug use in the military is low, far lower than in civilian society. The low numbers of drug offences within the British military have often been attributed to the extensive CDT that serves as a strong deterrent. The numbers of those being discharged for drug misuse are also falling.

Table 3.1: Figures for discharges for failing drug tests, for the years 2008–2011²⁰⁸

Year	Army	Royal Air Force	Royal Navy (including Royal Marines)
2008	580	20	60
2009	510	10	30
2010	460	20	40
2011	380 (up to November 2011)	40	30

Between January and December 2012, 140,563 drug tests were carried out on members of the Armed Forces, returning 575 positive results – a rate of just 0.4 per cent. 90 per cent of these positive results were drawn from the Army, while the rates of positive results were about twice as high for the Army when compared to the Navy and almost four times as high when compared to the RAF.²⁰⁹ This compares with 2.7 million civilian adults, or one in 12 (8.3 per cent) of the adult population of England and Wales that have used drugs other than alcohol in the past year.²¹⁰

However, the CSJ has learned that there is an increase in use amongst service personnel of so called “legal highs”, which are not screened for as part of the CDT process. Whilst anecdotal, the CSJ recommends further research into this area to ascertain the true scale of the problem.

Similarly, the expansion of a body building culture in recent years within the military is another area of concern.²¹¹ Anabolic steroids are banned along with other drugs within the military, and between 2009 and 2011 seven members of the Royal Navy have been discharged from Service for possession of steroids, with a further two disciplined and spending time

²⁰⁶ National Association of Probation Officers, *Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff*, London: NAPO (2009)

²⁰⁷ Veterans' Aid, *Annual Review 2012–13*, London: Veteran's Aid, 2013

²⁰⁸ Freedom of Information Reply Def Pers Sec/FOI:03-10-2013-095000-002, Ministry of Defence, 25 October 2013

²⁰⁹ Freedom of Information Reply FOI FOI-15-04-2013-120903-009, Ministry of Defence, 14 May 2013 [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/199938/20130514_FOI_04_2013_120903_009_CDT.pdf (18/12/13)]

²¹⁰ Home Office, *Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2012 to 2013 Crime Survey for England and Wales*, London: Home Office, 2013

²¹¹ Daily Telegraph, *Is body-building bad for soldiers' health?*, 25 October 2013

in detention.²¹² Whilst the CDT can screen for banned steroids, many sports nutritional products are exempt.

The long-term risks are clear; the use of these substances can have severe negative physical effects on the internal organs, and can result in periods of rage and psychosis. Such an increase in aggression can lead a group that are already vulnerable to committing violent crime – as outlined elsewhere in the report – to becoming even more violent.

3.7 Conclusion

Alcohol is consumed to significant levels within the Armed Forces. For a minority, this causes significant personal and professional problems which are magnified following discharge from the military. A fundamental part of military culture, alcohol creates patterns of behaviour that are unsustainable in the civilian world and which are both causes of, and contributors to, negative transition outcomes. The application of current policy towards alcohol in the military remains sporadic and ineffective, and it is being exploited with participants engaging in harmful levels of drinking. Within this, there is a clearly identifiable subgroup that is more vulnerable to developing problematic relationships with alcohol. Alcohol's contributions to poor transition, and other adverse physical and psychological effects, are clear.

The CDT policy is designed to both act as a deterrent but also preserve the operational integrity of the military. As such, the military's policy towards recreational drug use is clearly defined and works. However, there are several new trends, such as the rise in "legal highs" and sports supplements, emerging from wider society and infiltrating the military that need to be researched further so that policy on these areas can be better informed.

212. Freedom of Information Reply FOI-03-06-2011-144137-005, Ministry of Defence, 15 August 2011 [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/16886/FOI03062011144137005_Drug_Misuse.pdf (18/12/13)]

chapter four

Mental health

It is estimated that at least one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life, and one in six adults has a mental health problem at any one time.²¹³ In addition, almost half of all UK adults will experience at least one episode of depression during their lifetime.²¹⁴ Mental ill-health is a reality in the UK, for service personnel and civilians alike.

In some cases mental health can also be challenged by military service. Large numbers of former military personnel suffer from poor mental health, with conditions and symptoms of varying severity.

Successive governments have taken important steps in addressing the issue of Armed Forces mental health, with new strategies involving better post-service treatment and early interventions along with improved research in order to better understand it. Indeed, more than £22 million have been invested from LIBOR fines and other funds to specifically provide mental health programmes for the serving and former Armed Forces communities.²¹⁵ In addition, in the 2013 Autumn Statement, George Osborne announced a further £100 million of Libor fines would be made available to military charities including those providing mental health services, 'to reflect our society's debt of gratitude to our servicemen and women, and their families.'²¹⁶

The outcomes for service leavers with mental health issues are poor. A 2005 study identified that ex-service personnel who developed mental health problems during their military careers were at higher risk of social exclusion after leaving, and amongst other negative outcomes had a greater chance of being unemployed.²¹⁷ Those with a mental health diagnosis were also more

213 Department of Health, *No Health Without Mental Health: a cross government outcomes strategy for people of all ages*, London: Department of Health, 2011 [accessed via http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_123766 (05/11/13)]

214 Andrews G et al, 'Lifetime Risk of Depression: restricted to a minority or waiting for most?' *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 187, 2005

215 Department of Health, Press Release, *Mental health first aid training for veterans and their families*, 30 April 2013 [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mental-health-first-aid-training-for-veterans-and-their-families> (20/12/13)]

216 Hansard, Autumn Statement 2013, 5 December 2013

217 Iversen A et al, 'What happens to British veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?', *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005, pp175–184

likely to be divorced or separated than those former personnel who do not.²¹⁸ Alcoholism and homelessness can also follow. Because such individuals represent an especially vulnerable group of the ex-forces community, as far as possible it is vitally important that any mental health issues are addressed whilst they are still in uniform, and that they are not forced to confront them whilst going through the tumultuous process of transition and resettlement.

The combination of mental health issues that afflict those who are still serving, as well as the more long-term gestation of other debilitating conditions such as depression and PTSD that can affect former service personnel, mean that any response to mental health needs to be robust in order to help secure a long-term, successful transition.

The following chapter will outline the issue of mental health within the UK Armed Forces, as well as the negative impact it can have on the lives of former service personnel long after they have removed their uniforms.

4.1 Mental Health and the Armed Forces: more than PTSD

Mental health issues do not only afflict former members of the Armed Forces, but also serving personnel; in March 2013 the Ministry of Defence released statistics showing that since 2007 up to 11,000 serving members of the military have been diagnosed with mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. In 2012:

- 2,550 soldiers, sailors, aircrew and marines were treated for mental health issues whilst in uniform by the Ministry of Defence;²¹⁹
- 11 per cent, or 273 cases, were reports of PTSD, but 21 per cent of cases (547) related to mood disorders such as depression;²²⁰
- A total of 3,425 days were lost due to days spent in hospital.²²¹

In addition, 13,550 UK service personnel who had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan had at least one episode of care for a mental health disorder between 1 January 2007 and 30 June 2013.²²²

It must be noted that these are only the cases where those suffering have presented to treatment services with symptoms; it is not a complete picture of the state of mental health within the UK Armed Forces.

The long-term consequences of poor mental health cannot be ignored; a study has shown that those who are unwell in service with mental health issues not only remain unwell in the

218 Iversen A et al, "Goodbye and good luck": the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480-6

219 The Daily Telegraph, *PTSD on the rise among British servicemen and women after decade of war*, 17 March 2013

220 Ibid.

221 Freedom of Information Reply 17-10-2013-125053001, Ministry of Defence, 13 November 2013

222 Freedom of Information Reply (Reference Redacted), Ministry of Defence, 22 October 2013 [accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261193/PUBLIC_1383052345.pdf (10/12/13)]

long-term, but are also more likely to be unemployed after discharge.²²³ Psychological illness can also have a negative impact on family relationships and children.

PTSD has attracted the majority of media coverage surrounding military mental health. The Howard League have already noted the media concentration on the issue of PTSD at the expense of other, more prevalent, mental health issues such as anxiety or depression affecting service personnel that will continue in their post-military lives,²²⁴ and the CSJ share this concern. PTSD has become a blanket term that is often inaccurately applied to military mental health problems, and one that risks clouding equally pressing concerns.

A recent cohort study of those Armed Forces personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, detected likely cases of PTSD in four per cent of respondents.²²⁵ Levels of PTSD rose slightly over time from deployment, but remained broadly similar and rates remained relatively stable. This is in keeping with a 2005 cohort study of 8,195 veterans who had been deployed in Bosnia and the Gulf. Significantly, their mental health problems remained broadly static over the following ten years.²²⁶ Delayed prevalence studies, which specifically analyse the long-term mental health of a military cohort, have shown that there is a small minority who progress from a state of relative good health to mental ill-health, though few move across the spectrum entirely. The majority of movement was in the group classed as already being “unwell” to varying degrees.²²⁷ In addition, while PTSD amongst the general population is typically less complex, and more prevalent amongst women, the overall rates of PTSD for veterans are not astronomically higher than some studies have found in the general population.²²⁸

The cohort study has been able to identify that there is no increase in the incidence of PTSD or of adverse mental health in connection with the number of operational deployments, at least for the period 2003 to 2010.²²⁹ Personnel who have undertaken two or three operational deployments tend to be increasingly robust and their rates of mental health problems actually decrease. There is a selection bias in that those who develop mental health problems are substantially less likely to redeploy, leaving those who do as an increasingly selected and resilient group. Indeed, these are often more resilient than their civilian counterparts. Professor Sir Simon Wessely notes:

‘For every year that you serve, you become progressively more resilient, partly because those who do develop mental health problems are much more likely to leave. So with

223 Van Staden L et al, ‘Transition Back into Civilian Life: A Study of Personnel Leaving the U.K. Armed Forces via “Military Prison”’, *Military Medicine*, 172, 2007, pp925–930

224 Howard League for Penal Reform, *Report of the Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison*, London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011

225 Fear N et al., ‘What Are The Consequences of Deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces?’, *Lancet*, 375, 2010, pp1783–1797

226 Iversen A et al., ‘What happens to British veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?’, *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005, pp175–184

227 Goodwin L et al, ‘Prevalence of delayed onset PTSD in military personnel: is there evidence for the disorder? Results of a prospective UK Study’, *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorder*, 200, 2012, pp429–437

228 National Institute for Clinical Excellence, *Post-traumatic stress disorder: The management of PTSD in adults and children in primary and secondary care*, London: Royal College of Psychiatrists and British Psychological Society [accessed via: <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG026fullguideline.pdf> (20/03/14)]

229 Hotopf M et al, ‘The health of UK military personnel who deployed to the 2003 Iraq war: A cohort study’, *Lancet*, 2006, pp1731–41

*each increasing deployment the rate of mental health problems actually drops slightly, not because deployment is actually good for you but because those who are deploying twice, three times are being gradually selected towards a more resilient group.*²³⁰

The next wave of data collection is due in 2015, which will confirm if this remains the case.

However, whilst the number of deployments does not affect the frequency of PTSD, the length and frequency of operational deployments within service does. Thus, if one deploys for a longer period of time, with less respite between tours, that individual will become more vulnerable. For example, one 2007 study found a PTSD rate of three per cent among those deployed for less than five months in the previous 36, but this increased to 5.2 per cent among those deployed for 13 months or more of a 36-month period.²³¹ A consistent association was also found between prolonged deployments of longer than 13 months and problems at home both during and after deployment, both of which are contributory factors to deteriorating mental health.²³² There was also a common correlation between longer deployments, and exposure to a greater number of traumatic events, for obvious reasons.

Whilst long-term operations in Afghanistan will have ended with near-complete withdrawal in 2014, such findings should be noted if Britain commits to another long-term operation, given the Future Reserves 2020 plan. As such reductions have already begun, a situation has been created whereby fewer troops will be called upon to do more work, and this may lead to an increase in the diagnosis of PTSD, particularly if future operational requirements mean that the military are less able to adhere to Harmony Guidelines on tour length, and deploy fewer troops more frequently and for longer. The report noted that: 'Overstretch in the UK Armed Forces may have consequences on problems at home, and deterioration of psychological health may be more apparent in those directly exposed to combat.'²³³

However, there are other, more prevalent mental health disorders reported by servicemen and women. A report in 2005 found that 28.9 per cent of former service personnel self-reported as having had a mental health problem in service. 48.3 per cent of these cases involved depression and 37.9 per cent were stress related.²³⁴ The follow up cohort study in 2010 confirmed this, with alcohol misuse identified in 13 per cent of respondents, and common mental disorders in 19.7 per cent, far in excess of PTSD rates at 4 per cent.²³⁵

One group that can be adversely affected by military service are reservists. Since 2003, Britain has relied upon reservists in their missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Iraq War necessitated the first compulsory call-up of reservists from all three armed services since the Korean War in the 1950s, and saw 12,580 mobilised. However, research has since shown that reservists

230 Professor Sir Simon Wessely, Chatham House Event, 'The Psychological Cost of War: Tackling Military Mental Health', 11 June 2013, London

231 Rona R et al, 'Mental health consequences of overstretch in the UK armed forces: first phase of a cohort study', *British Medical Journal*, 335, 2007, p603 [accessed via <http://www.bmj.com/content/335/7620/603> (30/09/13)]

232 Ibid

233 Ibid

234 Iversen A et al, "'Goodbye and good luck': the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

235 Fear N et al, 'What are the consequences of deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of the UK armed forces? A cohort study', *Lancet*, 375, 2010, pp1783–97

and former members of the reserves are at greater risk of psychological illness as a result of their experiences. One study suggests more than a quarter (26 per cent) of those reservists deployed to Iraq had a mental disorder following deployment, and six per cent had PTSD as compared to 19 and four per cent respectively amongst their regular counterparts.²³⁶ This, and other research, has shown that 'there is evidence of a clinically and statistically significant adverse effect on health in reservists.'²³⁷ This is because, while they are exposed to the same traumatic events and strains of war, they do not have access to the usual support networks of the regular military, nor share the same levels of occupational integration.²³⁸ In terms of long-term risks, recent evidence suggests that these differences in mental health and also marital disruption can still be discerned five years later, and do not necessarily improve with time, with some perhaps suffering irrevocable damage.²³⁹

Steps to improve the knowledge and expertise of primary care services about veterans' mental health issues and increase the availability of treatment options are important and are underway, including a specialist Reserves Mental Health Programme.²⁴⁰ However, the current plan outlined in Future Reserves 2020 to substantially increase the number of reservists, and the responsibility they hold in the UK's strategic planning, potentially represents a grave risk to the long-term psychological health of thousands of individuals should there be another operational deployment.



Full prevention of PTSD and other diagnoses of mental ill-health by the UK Armed Forces would be impossible. The British Armed Forces do not operate a psychological screening system of recruits as current evidence does not support such a system as being of any value, given current knowledge, in identifying the potential for developing mental ill health

236 Hotopf M et al, 'The health of UK military personnel who deployed to the 2003 Iraq war: A cohort study', *Lancet*, 2006, pp1731–41

237 Iversen A et al, 'Mental health of regular and reserve military veterans', *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 15, 2009, pp100–6

238 Ibid

239 Harvey S et al, 'The long term consequences of military deployment ; A 5 year cohort study of UK Reservists deployed to Iraq in 2003', *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 176, 2012, pp1177–1184

240 British Army, *Reserves Mental Health Programme* [accessed via <http://www.army.mod.uk/welfare-support/23247.aspx> (03/01/2013)]

either when deployed or following a deployment.²⁴¹ Instead, in order to reduce the risk of psychological casualties, considerable investment has been made in high-quality training that seeks to replicate battle as closely as possible, along with an emphasis on leadership, unit cohesion and morale, all of which are proven to moderate the impact of subsequent psychological trauma and have been used as in-service preventative measures.²⁴² Yet there is an understanding that some service personnel will suffer psychological difficulties in later life. Successful and effective treatment of these conditions is therefore essential.

In addition, the Ministry of Defence has adopted and implemented the Traumatic Risk Management (TRiM) system across the Armed Forces. TRiM is evidence-based, having been pioneered by the Royal Marines, and operates as a peer-support driven intervention that helps organisations deal with the psychological aftermath of traumatic events. TRiM does not prevent PTSD, nor does it treat it, but it aims to identify those who may go on to develop diagnosable disorders and support them into specialist treatment where necessary. It also has advantages over its predecessors and other practices, such as Neuro-Linguistic programming (NLP), in that it is a single session psychological debriefing, and evidence from practice and research concluded that it does not cause harm. It is particularly useful for officers and NCOs, as it allows them to identify those at risk and, where possible, create the best possible conditions for psychological recovery to occur. The provision of social support, inherent within TRiM, is also a key factor in helping to deter future psychological illness. Practitioners trained in TRiM are embedded within units, and are active after traumatic events.²⁴³ As they are also more commonly specifically military personnel, rather than unfamiliar medical or welfare officers, it is also hoped that their presence will help reduce the stigma attached to mental health in the Armed Forces, and stress will instead be seen as a regular occupational hazard of military service to be addressed in the same way as any other. However, such stigma does remain.

4.2 The stigma of mental health illness in the Armed Forces

‘The fastest way to get out of the military is to admit that you have a mental health problem.’

Wayne Kirkham, National Project Manager for NHS England’s National Veterans Mental Health Network

Both the 2010 Murrison Report and the CSJ’s previous work on mental health have found that stigma deters service personnel from engaging with conventional mental health provision.²⁴⁴ Such stigma and perceived barriers to treatment have been targeted through several campaigns by the Armed Forces, such as “Don’t Bottle it Up” in 2012, which to some extent has accounted for the rise in treatment of psychological disorders reported by the

241 Professor Sir Simon Wessely, in evidence to the CSJ

242 Jones N et al, ‘Leadership, Cohesion, Morale and the Mental Health of UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan’, *Psychiatry*, 75, 2012, pp49–59

243 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

244 Andrew Murrison MD MP, *Fighting Fit: a mental health plan for servicemen and veterans*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2010 and Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

Ministry of Defence. As stigma lessens, more cases have presented where otherwise such symptoms would have been suppressed. Indeed, it is possible that the combination both of a slight reduction in stigma and a considerable reduction in the time it is taking mentally injured personnel to present, might be one factor behind the reported rise in cases of common mental disorders presenting to military mental health services in the last two years.

Nevertheless, despite some small encouraging signs issues of mental health are often still suppressed whilst in the military due to stigma or a fear of being judged by one's peers. Fear of the consequences of coming forward may also be a factor. A 2009 study found that 74 per cent of serving soldiers admitted to hospital with mental health problems were discharged from the Army prematurely, and 73 per cent of the discharges occurred within a year of hospitalisation.²⁴⁵ The prevalence of curtailed service following hospitalisation would inevitably create a climate whereby those suffering would not come forward and admit their issues for fear of what could follow.

Attitudes towards mental health in the military are slowly improving, but still present a challenge to the military and the general population that prevents treatment and results in some residual stigma remaining. For example, 26.1 per cent of military respondents in one 2013 survey disagreed with the phrase "Mental illness is an illness like any other," in comparison to 17.1 per cent of civilian respondents. However, 81.3 per cent of military personnel disagreed with the statement "One of the main causes of mental illness is a lack of self-discipline and willpower," compared to 62.4 per cent of the general population,²⁴⁶ showing that cultural changes on the nature of mental illness have taken place.

However, a study of the reduction of stigma between 2008 and 2011, including the fear of being treated differently by commanders and loss of trust among peers, revealed that stigma surrounding mental health existed at levels higher than previously believed. It also found that the likelihood of reporting stigma attached to mental health was greater during deployment and in the post-deployment period, as it would seemingly violate the strong professional culture of the military. This demonstrates that the concept of stigma is fluid and dependent on context, making it harder to counteract. Reluctance in reporting a mental health problem due to a fear of being treated differently by a commanding officer during a deployment fell by 12.2 per cent between 2009 and 2011 amongst those deployed. In post-deployed troops, it only fell by one per cent between 2008 and 2011. Such a fear was, however, still the most prevalent concern for both groups. There was also a 14.1 per cent fall in those deployed personnel who considered reporting a mental health issue to be embarrassing, in contrast to only a 5.3 per cent fall in post-deployed respondents over those same time frames.²⁴⁷ Other concerns and impediments to seeking help also included a belief that time could not be taken out of work to receive treatment, a lack of confidentiality and a strong belief that reporting such issues would hurt their career.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Jones N et al, 'Occupational outcomes in soldiers hospitalised with mental health problems', *Occupational Medicine*, 59, 2009, pp459–65

²⁴⁶ Forbes H et al, 'Attitudes to Mental Illness in the U.K. Military: A Comparison With the General Population', *Military Medicine*, 178, 2013, pp957–65

²⁴⁷ Osório C et al, 'Changes in Stigma and Barriers to Care Over Time in U.K. Armed Forces Deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq Between 2008 and 2011', *Military Medicine*, 178, 2013, pp846–53

²⁴⁸ Ibid

These findings demonstrate that whilst modest gains have been made in the UK Armed Forces' anti-stigma campaigns, a 'significant proportion of personnel continue to report these beliefs and predict that any mental health seeking behaviour may adversely affect their relationship with peers and commanders and that help-seeking may also impact their career.'²⁴⁹ As such, the gains made by the Armed Forces to reduce stigma and barriers to care need to be continued. Further gains and changes need to be driven by the Armed Forces at a cultural as well as an operational and strategic level, and require the full participation of service personnel, in order to be effective; they cannot be imposed by outside bodies.

4.3 The mental health of former members of the Armed Forces

'I lost 20 years of my life to PTSD.'

Joseph, former soldier, in evidence to the CSJ

Evaluating the psychological cost of war is a complicated process. Current data, and historical experience, suggest that a small minority are plagued by mental ill-health. As a 2013 study into military mental health noted: 'That mental health effects of warfare are often delayed, sometimes even for years, is also likely to contribute to the higher prevalence figures for veterans who have returned to civilian life.'²⁵⁰

In the ex-Armed Forces community in the UK, issues surrounding mental health are more prevalent among 25–54s and peak among 35–44s.²⁵¹ Given that 60 per cent of all non-officer outflow from the UK Armed Forces in the last two years occurred between the ages of 20 and 34,²⁵² this would suggest that mental health disorders lie dormant for some years after the individual leaves uniform. The charity Combat Stress told the CSJ that on average it takes 13 years for someone to contact them and seek help.

These are problems that are not going to fade away as active operations in Afghanistan end in 2014. Combat Stress expect 40,000 veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan to exhibit symptoms of mental ill-health, 7,500 of which are likely to be suffering from PTSD,²⁵³ and will require mental health treatment. These problems, of which depression and alcohol abuse are the most common,²⁵⁴ can act as severe barriers in transition, even several years after leaving the military.

249 Osório C et al, 'Changes in Stigma and Barriers to Care Over Time in U.K. Armed Forces Deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq Between 2008 and 2011', *Military Medicine*, 178, 2013, pp846–53

250 ForcesWatch, *The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces*, London: ForcesWatch, 2013

251 Royal British Legion, *Profile of the Ex-Service Community in the UK*, London: Royal British Legion, 2005

252 DASA, *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report, 1 April 2013*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 (accessed via http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/personnel/military/annual-personnel-report/2013/1_april_2013.pdf (13/11/13)) and DASA, *UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report, 1 April 2012*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013 (accessed via http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/personnel/military/annual-personnel-report/2012/1_april_2012.pdf (14/11/13))

253 Combat Stress, *Annual Review 2012*, London: Combat Stress, 2012

254 Iversen A et al, "'Goodbye and good luck': the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

Joseph, a former soldier from Northern Ireland told the CSJ how his deteriorating mental health prevented his successful transition:

'My mental health was ok when I left, but it got a lot worse once I was out. I was trying to settle, to re-train, but struggled and ended up working odd jobs, and became transient. All of that piled more unnecessary stress on, into an already stressful situation. My drink and drug problems increased and I lost the support of my family unit. I couldn't go home to Northern Ireland having served in the British Army due to the security situation, especially not as a Catholic. My PTSD got worse, and I ended up homeless, sleeping rough in York for two years.'

Reservists also suffer significantly in this area, as they are rapidly returned to civilian life, away from a supportive structure and colleagues with whom they may have shared a traumatic experience. Difficulties endured on deployment, including such issues as lower morale and lower unit cohesion, as well as the negative experience of homecoming which often results in marital dissatisfaction, have led to a significant and persisting increase in ill health.²⁵⁵

Previous studies have noted considerable reluctance amongst former members of the Armed Forces community to seek help for their mental health. A 2005 study found that only 58.4 per cent of those with a mental health disorder were currently seeking help.²⁵⁶ Reticence to seek help was also noticeable in more recent research.²⁵⁷ A barrier to admitting problems and seeking help certainly exists, and results in serious challenges to providing effective mental health support to the former Armed Forces community.

4.4 Treatment

The treatment of mental health issues for currently serving personnel within the Armed Forces is administered by the Defence Medical Services (DMS). The DMS provide all medical care for personnel within the military, and their purpose is to ensure that service personnel are ready and medically 'fit for task.' It does this by providing primary healthcare, dental care, secondary care, rehabilitation, occupational medicine, specialist medical care and community mental healthcare, with 15 military-run Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMH) in the UK with a further five DCMHs at the major permanent overseas bases.²⁵⁸ These services are provided within the UK and wherever the British Armed Forces are serving abroad. In many ways this provides a comprehensive and encompassing service that currently exceeds anything supplied by the NHS, which has the potential to contribute to a problematic situation for ex-members of the Armed Forces, who are no longer able to

255 Brown T et al, 'Explanations for the increase in mental health problems in UK reserve forces who have served in Iraq', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 190, 2007, pp484–9

256 Iversen A et al, "'Goodbye and good luck': the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

257 Iversen A et al, 'Help-seeking and receipt of treatment among UK service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 197, 2010, pp149–55, and Iversen A et al, 'The stigma of mental health problems and other barriers to care in the UK Armed Forces', *BMC Health Services Research*, 11, 2011, p3.

258 Ministry of Defence, *Defence Medical Services*, 26 September 2013 [accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/defence-medical-services> (14/11/13)]

access such services and instead must rely on unfamiliar and inconsistent mainstream mental health services.

The CSJ has heard anecdotal evidence of previous difficulties encountered by the ex-Armed Forces community in accessing these NHS-provided mental health services, and difficulties in matching the standards and in particular the speed of the DMS. The frustrations caused by these difficulties have created a negative picture of the NHS's abilities. Moreover, the NHS is perceived to be ill-equipped to identify and respond to the specific needs and cultural idiosyncrasies of the ex-Armed Forces community. Russ Pierre, from the charity Surf Action, told the CSJ that:

'Our clients have complex psychological needs, and think that, because their local GP hasn't served in the military or been to Iraq, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, or wherever, they won't understand them, and so can't help them.'

The quality of NHS care has also varied across the UK. Professor Neil Greenberg described the quality and provision of these services to the CSJ as a relative 'post code lottery,' and while services in some areas were good, coordinated by interested GPs and specialists, in others such knowledge and expertise was lacking and waiting lists to access care were unhelpfully long. In 2005, for example, general practitioners (GPs) were providing the vast majority of care to those seeking help, despite them needing specialist services – only four per cent had received cognitive behavioural therapy, for example.²⁵⁹ Such difficulties became well known and a self-perpetuating cycle was established that prevented further engagement for subsequent former service personnel seeking help. Such perceptions have consequently created a reticence amongst some ex-service personnel to turn to the NHS when suffering from mental ill-health.

The CSJ has learned during its research that the transfer of medical care from the DMS to the NHS has also not been successful in the past, with a significant breakpoint in the provision of care. This has been caused by the abrupt removal of care from DMS at the point of discharge, and there being no immediate continuity of care from the NHS to former service personnel. This break, which can be indefinite, often provides the unwelcome opportunity for an individual's mental health issues to spiral out of control, and adversely affect other aspects of their life. As this takes place alongside the resettlement and transition process, difficulties in securing employment or housing, amongst other problems, can act as triggers to intensify and worsen mental health conditions, which in turn continue to impact negatively on resolving these practical issues. Incompatibility between electronic databases at the MoD and Department of Health has also greatly complicated the handover and proper communication of medical history.

The consequences of not receiving treatment, and the interlinked nature of issues such as alcohol and substance abuse, crime, family breakdown and homelessness, amongst others, can result in a destructive downward spiral that prevents re-integration into civilian life. The physical impact on health can also be significant.

²⁵⁹ Iversen A et al, "Goodbye and good luck": the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

Case study: Carol's story²⁶⁰

Carol is 23 years old and served with 3 Medical Regiment, leaving in 2012 after just over four years' service.

During her military career, Carol had completed a tour in Afghanistan, where she witnessed events that were to lead to debilitating PTSD. During her tour, her ambulance was nicknamed the 'death bus,' due to the seriousness of the casualties she had to deal with, most of whom were unlikely to survive. The first medical emergency she had to deal with was the lifeless body of a two-year-old Afghanistan boy, who had been involved in an explosion. Unfortunately the little boy was already dead but for protocol reasons, Carol was instructed by her senior officer to perform mouth to mouth and CPR for an extended period of time, about 45 minutes. This had a massive impact on her, having to work on such a small child, knowing that it was a pointless exercise and that no recovery was possible. The recovery of the decomposing body of an eight year old child – the same age as her brother – that had drowned was another traumatic event that figured strongly in her experiences. Carol has said that there is not a day when she does not revisit this memory.

She was already beginning to suffer the symptoms of PTSD whilst on active duty in Afghanistan. Having advised her senior officers of her ill health and inability to cope, she was encouraged to leave the forces, which she then did. Support had not been offered but she had been told to "go home and have a drink" to help her forget.

Carol quickly became an alcoholic, unable to ease the daily thoughts or night terrors and she fell into a spiral of self-destruction. Her alcohol consumption had a knock-on effect on other aspects of her life; it led to the complete breakdown of her relationship with her family, which Carol had initiated out of self-loathing and the belief that she was a disappointment, and she became unable to hold down a job or accommodation, rendering her effectively homeless and forced to rely on friends to provide temporary accommodation. Due to her mental health and deteriorating behaviour she exhausted her welcome amongst her remaining friends and was left with nowhere to stay. She eventually became suicidal and made several serious attempts at ending her life.

After contacting the local Citizens Advice Bureau, she was referred to The Beacon, a sheltered accommodation facility operated by the Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services (SPACES). Once there, she underwent a health and wellbeing assessment that uncovered to staff her previous difficulties, and where Carol admitted that her PTSD began during her active service in Afghanistan.

Her alcohol consumption had also resulted in contact with the police and criminal justice system. She had been charged with criminal damage, assault, aggressive behaviour and finally assaulting a police officer whilst being restrained. Carol was given a curfew of 7am–7pm for 12 weeks, which confined her to her room and resulted in isolation, worsening her mental health. Whilst in a psychiatric hospital for the second time she attempted to escape through the air vents, but was arrested by police. Staff stood laughing at her failed attempt which once again reinforced her self-loathing. Eventually a final attempt resulted in her being sectioned for four months whilst The Beacon served as her advocate with the courts, police and the NHS.

²⁶⁰ Case study provided by The Beacon, a supported housing partnership scheme between Riverside ECHG and the Ministry of Defence. Name has been changed



Carol is now engaged in treatment and is able to manage and cope with her PTSD. Alongside this, she is also retraining and taking all opportunities to educate herself with courses at The Beacon, as well as working with a mentor assigned by them. Carol's aim is to secure employment as a Business Admin Assistant but eventually she would like to return to the care sector, offering support and comfort to others. Sadly, her current and previous police record may prevent this, but she is taking steps to make a better future for herself after losing so much time to mental illness.

Third sector organisations such as the Royal British Legion, Combat Stress, and many other smaller organisations at a local level have sought to facilitate better treatment and become providers of care that specially address the needs of former personnel. Whilst delivering a need, such a fragmented group has resulted in a diverse number of approaches, methodology, philosophies, governance and evaluation practices. In addition, such providers are often unregulated, though some, such as Combat Stress, have deliberately and commendably secured Department of Health and NHS backing for their PTSD treatment courses, and now work closely with them as a major care provider.

4.5 What contributes to poor mental health in the ex-Armed Forces community?

It is possible to identify vulnerable groups from within the military cohort. Rank is one such factor. According to a 2005 study, 55 per cent of those self-reporting former service personnel with a mental health issue held the rank of Private, and 33 per cent had been NCOs.²⁶¹

Another factor in developing psychological problems is educational attainment. 82 per cent of those with a Major Depressive or PTSD diagnosis in a 2005 study were of a low education attainment.²⁶²

The length of service is also a significant factor in the long-term mental health of the ex-forces community. Traditionally, it is Early Service Leavers (ESLs), occasionally those who do not even complete training, who are the most vulnerable to suffering negative mental health and who tend to experience the poorest outcomes in their post-military lives. This is because personnel with mental health diagnoses during their military careers are more likely to leave than both personnel with no mental health diagnoses and personnel with physical health problems.²⁶³ As such, they are likely to leave without planning to do so, potentially

261 Iversen A et al, "Goodbye and good luck": the mental health needs and treatment experiences of British ex-service personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 186, 2005, pp480–6

262 Ibid

263 Creamer M et al, 'Psychiatric disorder and separation from military service: A 10-year retrospective study', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 163, 2006, pp733–4

becoming ESLs. In 2005, the King's Centre for Military Health Research found that, of their sample of ESLs, half had a psychiatric diagnosis, most commonly depression, along with a high prevalence of alcohol problems. In contrast, another study looking at 4,000 normal service leavers between 1991 and 2001 showed that 90 per cent had secured employment, and as a cohort enjoyed far better outcomes than their ESLs counterparts.²⁶⁴ Such findings were confirmed by a 2013 study that showed that self-reported mental health problems were more prevalent among ESLs than non-ESLs, and that ESLs were at an increased risk of probable post-traumatic stress disorder and other common mental disorders. It was not clear from this study whether such problems developed in service, or after leaving the military.²⁶⁵

Such conclusions have been supported by the CSJ's previous work on mental health. In *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty* the CSJ noted,

*'Among this population higher levels of pre-existing risks and factors for adverse mental health outcomes are evident. Many would have exhibited problems in whatever walk of life they entered, indeed their exiting of the service early is further evidence of underlying pre-existing mental health risks.'*²⁶⁶

For those who graduate from basic training and become part of the trained strength of the Armed Forces, and perhaps serve on an operational tour of duty, many instances of mental ill-health have their roots in pre-existing, pre-service, vulnerability and disadvantage.²⁶⁷ More than a third of ESLs in one study (33.8 per cent) were identified as having endured the highest levels of childhood adversity.²⁶⁸ Ongoing research increasingly shows that service leavers with mental health problems often present with significant clinical complexity due to a combination of early life difficulties,²⁶⁹ and as such there is a clear correlation between the two. The combination of such backgrounds and their experiences of direct conflict whilst in uniform, which have already been identified as having a causal adverse effect on mental health, can result in periods of psychiatric morbidity in later life.

In addition, previous research has demonstrated that service personnel who joined the Armed Forces before they were 18 are significantly more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other serious mental health problems when leaving the forces.²⁷⁰ In the past five years, 32 per cent of all under-18s recruited to the Armed Forces joined the infantry, which makes up only 14 per cent of Britain's Armed Forces.²⁷¹

264 Iversen A et al, 'What happens to British veterans when they leave the Armed Forces?', *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005, pp175–184

265 Buckman J et al, 'Early Service Leavers: A study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early', *European Journal of Public Health*, 23, 2013, pp410–415

266 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

267 Centre for Social Justice, *Mental Health: Poverty, Ethnicity and Family Breakdown*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011 and Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

268 Buckman J et al, 'Early Service Leavers: A study of the factors associated with premature separation from the UK Armed Forces and the mental health of those that leave early', *European Journal of Public Health*, 23, 2013, pp410–415

269 Iversen A et al, 'Influence of childhood adversity on health among male UK military personnel', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 191, 2007, pp506–511

270 ForcesWatch, *The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces*, London: ForcesWatch, 2013

271 Ibid

Thus, young people with some of the greatest disadvantages and vulnerabilities to developing psychological morbidity in both the short- and long-term have been placed in the role most likely to exacerbate psychological trauma.

4.6 Suicide and the Armed Forces

The issue of suicide in the British Armed Forces has been highlighted previously by the CSJ.²⁷² In the UK, suicide amongst current and former UK Armed Forces and Veteran personnel receives much political, public and media attention.²⁷³

One often quoted example of untreated mental health issues amongst service leavers was that more Falklands veterans had killed themselves since the end of the conflict in 1982 than had died fighting in it, an indicator of untreated mental health issues. However, a December 2013 review found that since 1982 there had been 1,335 deaths among the Falkland veterans, 90 per cent of which had taken place since leaving the UK Armed Forces. Of these 1,335 deaths, 1,046 (78 per cent) were the result of disease, while 19 per cent, or 247, of veteran deaths were due to external causes of injury. Only 95, or seven per cent, of the deaths for this group, were due to suicide, belying the myth.²⁷⁴

In terms of more recent conflicts, over a nine-year period between 1996 and 2005, 233,803 individuals left the Armed Forces. Of these, 224 took their own lives. Whilst the overall rate of suicide did not exceed that of the wider civilian population, the risk of suicide in men aged 24 or younger who had left the Armed Forces was between two and three times higher than the risk for men the same age who either were still serving or were civilians. As such, young men who leave the UK Armed Forces are at an increased risk of suicide, though it is believed that such risk reflects pre-service vulnerabilities as opposed to experiences in uniform or after discharge.²⁷⁵ Such a conclusion highlights the wider conclusions of this report of an increased level of vulnerability amongst certain military groups.

4.7 The national response

There has been a strong drive from Whitehall to improve the provision of mental health treatment services for ex-Armed Forces personnel. In his 2010 report, Dr Andrew Murrison MP identified the provision of mental health services as one of the priorities in facilitating transitions that required improvement, along with prosthetics.²⁷⁶ In response to the Murrison Report, the mental health care infrastructure was improved through an expansion in the number of specific former military mental health workers, the establishment of new community mental health services for ex-service personnel, and increased investment in

272 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

273 BBC News, 'UK soldier and veteran suicides outstrip Afghan deaths', 14 July 2013 [accessed via <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23259865> (14/11/13)]

274 DASA, *A study of deaths among UK Armed Forces personnel deployed to the 1982 Falklands Campaign: 1982 to 2012*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2013

275 Kapur N et al, 'Suicide after Leaving the UK Armed Forces – A Cohort Study', *PLoS Medicine*, 6, 2009

276 Andrew Murrison MD MP, *Fighting Fit: A mental health plan for service men and veterans*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2010

regional NHS community mental health services to work specifically with former members of the Armed Forces.²⁷⁷ This was achieved in collaboration with Combat Stress, who now operates the main inpatient PTSD treatment programme with three main treatment centres across the UK.

NHS community mental health teams have been expanded in order to improve access to, and the quality of, mental health services so as to support a vulnerable group in society. They are funded by the Veteran Mental Healthcare budget, which is ring-fenced from the rest of the NHS budget.²⁷⁸ Since August 2007, any ex-service personnel with operational experience since the Falklands War have been able to access free, expert, confidential mental health assessment by a psychiatrist with extensive military experience and knowledge of military psychiatry.²⁷⁹

New NHS services that specifically target the needs of service leavers have also been developed in response to the reluctance to self-present described above. Anecdotally, many former service personnel have commented that providing veteran-specific services that are designed to address “veteran problems,” and are therefore distinct from those available to ordinary civilians, will encourage greater engagement.²⁸⁰ The knowledge gap between civilian healthcare professionals and veterans has narrowed, but more effort should still be made to ensure those responsible for delivering medical services fully understand the stresses, symptoms and nature of military service. This will produce a more effective service, and one that is better able to deliver mental health treatment to ex-Forces personnel.

In the United States, the Department of Veterans Affairs runs treatment centres, but this is because the US has no single national health provider. However, given that former members of the UK Armed Forces number around 4.8 million, representing eight per cent of the wider 63.7 million-strong population, a specific, distinct healthcare programme and facilities for former military personnel would not be justified.

The question also arises as to where such ex-Forces-only institutions would be based. Whilst ex-service personnel often live in areas near to military bases where they previously served, many do not, and with only eight per cent of the UK population having served, they are scattered across the country. Currently, Combat Stress and Help for Heroes operate such facilities, but only in a few places. As Professor Sir Simon Wessely told the CSJ:

‘You need community based teams, which is what NHS Mental Health has been doing for 50 years. The problem with that is you need local facilities not bricks and mortar. So using NHS staff in community and mental health teams you might be able to get around the geographical issue’

277 Andrew Murrison MD MP, *Fighting Fit: a mental health plan for servicemen and veterans*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2010

278 MacManus D and Wessely S, ‘Veteran mental health services in the UK: Are we headed in the right direction?’, *Journal of Mental Health*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013, pp301–5

279 Ministry of Defence, *Veterans Health – Extension of the Scope of the Medical Assessment Programme (MAP)* London: Ministry of Defence, 2007

280 Ben-Zeev D et al, ‘Stigma of mental illness and service use in the military’, *Journal of Mental Health*, 21, 2012, pp264–273

Having central sites of treatment requires those experiencing difficulties to travel to them, where they can undertake a course. However, follow-up support is sporadic, particularly in rural regions such as the South West, and areas such as Cornwall, which have a higher concentration of ex-service personnel. The NHS is also a clinical organisation, and unaccustomed to providing such social support. Such a gap, both in mainstream charity and NHS services, has led to a rise of smaller, community charities attempting to redress the balance and work around what the larger charities are doing. Russ Pierre of Surf Action told the CSJ that:

'We fill a gap in the South West because there is nothing else down there. The MoD and the NHS did a pilot programme and Cornwall was one of them, when they set up the PTSD support groups. When we read the report it said of 16 vets in Cornwall, 15 were deemed to be better. 13 of those are still with us now, and they're not better. There is this gap and we fill it.'

Therefore, rather than having a limited number of fixed sites, it would be preferable to have a flexible approach, utilising existing infrastructure that is able to extend its reach across the UK. This would ensure a provision of practitioners in each geographical area with knowledge of working with veterans and their needs.²⁸¹

There is also an issue as to who should provide this treatment. As mentioned earlier, the CSJ has learned anecdotally that the NHS is not perceived as being understanding or responsive to the needs of ex-military personnel, and that veterans prefer to be assessed by and treated by fellow service leavers, who have lived the life they have, and experienced similar events. However, there is no reason why mainstream services cannot be made more receptive to the needs and concerns of ex-service personnel.

Yet improving understanding of the context of the military, and the military's own specific culture, within the NHS will help improve engagement along with a programme of education for staff that will increase awareness of the problems that affect ex-service personnel. One such issue is alcohol abuse. This report has already shown the endemic levels of problematic drinking in UK Armed Forces that persist after discharge from the military, but the NHS will not provide co-morbid mental health treatment for anyone living with addiction. Therefore, the rather idiosyncratic relationship between the military and alcohol can currently act as a barrier to treatment. An acknowledgement of this, and a change in practice and policy when dealing with ex-Forces personnel, will be a major step in delivering services. The CSJ has previously argued for such a policy.²⁸²

It will also help overcome some of the issues within the NHS that Professor Simon Wessely has identified:

281 MacManus D and Wessely S, 'Veteran mental health services in the UK: Are we headed in the right direction?', *Journal of Mental Health*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013, pp301–5

282 Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

'I think also the issue about being treated by or with veterans might be because the NHS doesn't cope well with these kind of problems at a structural level. Services are reasonably coherent for minor problems that can be dealt with at a primary care level, and secondary services are well designed for the severe end of the spectrum, namely psychoses like bipolar or schizophrenia, or alternatively old age services, but there is a large gap for people somewhere in between. Those too difficult for a GP, but not severe enough for secondary services, often struggle to get treatment. Veterans can fall into this category, especially when the problems are complicated and involve mixing up substance misuse, trouble with the law, unstable housing, employment, relationships as well as formal mental disorders. This weakness with the NHS is true whether someone is a veteran or not.'

Regardless, the NHS remains the best vehicle for delivering these services, as, ideally, it is able to absorb and respond to the individual needs of each case. Whilst former members of the Armed Forces community do have specific needs, these are not necessarily needs that cannot be found elsewhere in civilian society, and should be catered for by mainstream services. Therefore, there is no need to replicate those that already exist. Creating such a distinction could well have a negative impact. Wayne Kirkham, the National Project Manager for NHS England's National Veterans Mental Health Network and a former soldier, told the CSJ:

'The issue remains, how can you prioritise one group over another? Why should someone who was in the military, but never deployed, have better access to treatment than anyone else from the blue light emergency services that spent years dealing with traumatic incidences such as fires, road traffic accidents, or medical emergencies? By labelling one group as special, you risk creating a dependent society. We don't need to make them special to deliver treatment, we just need to raise standards, and improve mental health services for all, regardless of what your occupation was or is.'

The best means of improving mental health services for veterans will be to improve services within the existing NHS structure, whilst also making better use of voluntary organisations and charities to provide social support alongside clinical treatment.

4.8 Conclusion

The issue of mental health in the Armed Forces community remains significant. Challenges remain in the delivery of treatment to those who are currently still serving, in particular the issue of overcoming stigma that will allow those suffering to come forward and receive treatment. Those who develop mental health problems within the military are still poorly served once they leave the Armed Forces.

The current poor outcomes and social exclusion for those suffering from mental health disorders are clear. Depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse and PTSD all disproportionately affect an already vulnerable group of service leavers, and if left untreated can increase social dislocation and isolation, resulting in poor and failed transitions. The need to invest resources more sensibly, and improve access to mental health treatment service across the country for the whole of the British population, are clear, and will help deliver better outcomes.

chapter five

Crime

Crime and criminal activity are one aspect of poor transition, and the issue of former service personnel serving custodial sentences has been the subject of a major review in recent years.²⁸³ In January 2014 it was also announced that concern over the number of soldiers who end up in contact with the criminal justice system and prison, and their subsequent rehabilitation, was going to be the subject of a government review.²⁸⁴ Unemployment, alcohol abuse, poor mental health, and problems with housing are all contributory factors to ex-forces personnel committing crimes. Currently, this group of ex-service personnel struggle to access the support they need whilst in prison and are often excluded from the provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant after their release, putting them at further risk of failing to reintegrate socially and economically into British society.

There are certain groups of service leavers who can fall into criminality once they leave the military. Those who experienced high levels of economic and social adversity in childhood and went on to serve multiple tours of duty in the Army in combat roles are in particular more susceptible to committing and being imprisoned for crimes. The committing of violent crime, in particular, occurs at a far greater rate than amongst their civilian counterparts of the same age. Crime is both a cause and consequence of poor transition, excluding some ex-service personnel from society and vastly increasing the difficulty of the transition process.

5.1 Ex-Armed Forces in the criminal justice system

UK veterans are, as a whole, less likely to offend than their civilian counterparts despite sharing factors associated with offending. These include being young, male, having low educational attainment and growing up in areas of urban deprivation.

Despite many having a disadvantaged background, in 2008 it was estimated that former members of the Armed Forces are 30 per cent less likely to be imprisoned than the civilian

283 Howard League for Penal Reform, *Report of the Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison*, London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011.

284 The Guardian, *Concern over number of soldiers who end up in jail prompts review*, 11 January 2014

population²⁸⁵, though obviously contact with the criminal justice system extends further than solely being in prison. Such statistics suggest that military service reduces criminality, almost certainly because the individual is removed from a potentially problematic environment, given a stable income in highly disciplined environment, and afforded little opportunity for criminality.



However, it is possible that in some cases military service only distracts from criminality and may, in others, increase its likelihood. As such, former members of the Armed Forces make up the largest single occupational group in UK prisons.²⁸⁶ The CSJ visited prisons as part of its research to meet with former members of the Armed Forces, and learned that the vast majority had come from deprived backgrounds, joining the Army in particular to

escape unemployment or worse in their local area. It was once they returned, and struggled to re-integrate, that they began to commit crimes for which they are now being punished.

5.2 Ex-Armed Forces in the criminal justice system: numbers

'Some veterans do end up in prison, and it is reasonable for us to consider whether our society is doing everything possible to reduce that number.'²⁸⁷

Data on the number of prisoners inside the UK criminal justice system who are ex-Armed Forces is complicated for a variety of factors, and the numbers have been heavily distorted in some reports.²⁸⁸ The exact number of former Service personnel in prison in England and Wales is currently unknown, but according to a report by DASA Health International that was published in January 2010, 2,207 prisoners, or three per cent of the prison population in England and Wales, had spent time in the UK Armed Forces.²⁸⁹ This figure was found through matching a database of all prisoners aged 18 and over with a database of Regular Service leavers from all three branches of the Armed Forces. However, the results of this study were limited as they only extended as far back as records were available. In September 2010 this

285 The Royal British Legion, *Literature Review: UK veterans and the criminal justice system*, London: The Royal British Legion, 2011 [accessed via http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/media/31583/LitRev_UKVetsCrimJustice.pdf (28/10/13)]

286 MacManus D, and Wessely S, 'Why do some ex-armed forces personnel end up in prison?', *British Medical Journal*, 342, 2011

287 MacManus D, and Wessely S, 'Why do some ex-armed forces personnel end up in prison?', *British Medical Journal*, 342, 2011

288 The Guardian, *Why are so many former soldiers in prison?*, 9 February 2010, and The Daily Telegraph, *Thousands of war veterans locked in British prisons*, 30 August 2008, National Association of Probation Officers, *Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff*, London: NAPo, 2009

289 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces: a data matching exercise carried out by the MoD in collaboration with the MoJ*, London: Ministry of Defence, January 2010

figure was revised up to 2,820, or 3.5 per cent, of the prison population as having served in the Armed Forces.²⁹⁰ Such figures correlate closely with the findings of other reports.²⁹¹

As can be seen in the table below, the majority of prisoners incarcerated in prisons in England and Wales and also in Scotland are from an Army background.

Table 5.1: Comparison of service history amongst ex-military prisoners in England and Wales and Scotland (%)

	Army	Royal Navy	Royal Air Force
England and Wales ²⁹²	77	15	8
Scotland ²⁹³	79	8	7

In addition, in England and Wales, former officers represented just one per cent of ex-Armed Forces personnel in prison, despite the fact that in 2010 17 per cent of the serving Armed Forces were officers. As such, it is clear that the issue of former members of Armed Forces incarcerated in prisons is dominated by those who served amongst the lower ranks, a cohort that this report has already identified as being more vulnerable to struggling transition.

The links between struggles in transition and the committing of offences are clear, although the criminality is not apparent immediately. 22 per cent of those imprisoned committed their offence within five years of being discharged, and 41 per cent, or 907 former service personnel, offended within 10 years of leaving the Armed Forces.²⁹⁴

Greater detail in the data is required to ascertain whether there is a correlation between length of service and the numbers of ex-Armed Forces personnel in prison so as to identify which groups are most at risk of offending after their military careers. Currently there are only estimates based on sample research. The Howard League, for example, found that the average military service of prisoners to have been seven years.²⁹⁵

The DASA report is now, however, four years old. More than 80,000 service personnel have been discharged from the military since then, many of whom will have completed operation tours. Given the increased numbers of deployments, with over 160,000 UK regular and reserve forces being deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, or both since 2001, and the impact

²⁹⁰ Ibid

²⁹¹ Howard League for Penal Reform, *Report of the Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison*, London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011

²⁹² DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010

²⁹³ Scottish Prison Service, *Military Veteran Prisoner Survey 2011*, Edinburgh: Scottish Prison Service [accessed via <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Publications/Publication-3129.aspx> (03/12/13)]. It should be noted that 6 per cent of ex-Armed Forces personnel gave no response when asked which branch of the forces they served in.

²⁹⁴ DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010. It is also important to note that the DASA report did not analyse the previous criminal records of service personnel in prison, but instead focused on their current prison sentence. As will be outlined later in this chapter, many members of Armed Forces already possessed a propensity or a conviction for violence.

²⁹⁵ Howard League for Penal Reform, *Report of the Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison*, London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2011

this has on offending – which is discussed in more detail below – such a statistic may now be higher and likely to rise further. Since 2012, the question ‘Are you a veteran (ex-armed services)?’ has been included in the questionnaires that are filled in by prisoners during the inspection of prisons by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Between January 2012 and July 2013, 51 reports have been published that carry such statistics. Based on these statistics, ex-Armed Forces personnel represent 5.7 per cent of the prison population.²⁹⁶ As of 13 December 2013, the UK’s prison population was 85,255, meaning that approximately 5,860 ex-service personnel are in prison, more than double DASA’s estimate. Such statistics are, however, based on self-identification and not specific data matching, meaning the results of these surveys can vary slightly, with a March 2014 report from HMIP estimating the Armed Forces population at 7 per cent.

These numbers exist at a considerable cost to the state. HMP Wandsworth, for example, reported a seven per cent response rate for those declaring themselves to be a former member of the Armed Forces.²⁹⁷ HMP Wandsworth’s cost per prisoner based on direct expenditure alone would suggest that Wandsworth’s ex-military population costs the taxpayer more than £2 million per year.

Contact with the criminal justice system is not merely defined by being in prison, but also by those who are currently on probation, or serving Community Orders. However, once again figures for this cohort vary. A 2009 survey suggested that six per cent of those under supervision were former members of the Armed Forces, of which over 40 per cent related to a chronic use of alcohol, highlighting further the link between alcohol abuse and criminality in the ex-Armed Forces community.²⁹⁸ In addition, among those starting Community Orders between October 2009 and December 2010, five per cent, or 7,219, had been in the Armed Forces.²⁹⁹

5.3 Ex-Armed Forces in the criminal justice system: offences

‘The Army is a way of life. When you come out and you can’t find anything else, you fall back on instinct. And that means you fight.’

Mickey, ex-Army and repeat offender

Whilst the exact numbers of former service personnel in contact with the criminal justice system are difficult to ascertain, dominant themes in the crimes that brought them there can

296 HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 51 reports of inspections of prisons and Young Offenders Institutes, [accessed via <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmi-prisons/prison-and-yoi> (13/12/13)]. The CSJ is grateful for Steve Lowe for helping with this information.

297 HM Inspectorate of Prisons, Report on an announced inspection of HMP Wandsworth by HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons, London: Ministry of Justice, June 2013 [accessed via <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/inspectorate-reports/hmipris/prison-and-yoi-inspections/wandsworth/wandsworth-2013.pdf> (02/12/13)]

298 National Association of Probation Officers, *Armed Forces and the Criminal Justice System: A briefing from Napo the Trade Union and Professional Association for Family Court and Probation Staff*, London: NAPO, 2009

299 Cattell J et al, *Results from the Offender Management Community Cohort Study (OMCCS): Assessment and sentence planning*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2013

be identified. Violence is the most common criminal activity, with one in three veterans in custody for violence against the person.³⁰⁰

Male soldiers under 30 are three times more likely to be convicted of violent offences than civilians of the same age. In a 2013 study, 30 per cent of service personnel younger than 30 years of age, serving and ex-serving, had committed an offence, 68 per cent of which were violent. Of these, 69 per cent had an educational achievement level termed as 'low', meaning having achieved GCSE or O-Level equivalent or less. The dominant service committing such offences, only partly explained by their numerical dominance in the Armed Forces, were the Army; 81 per cent of violent offences had been committed by soldiers.³⁰¹ Their dominance may also be explained by the fact that the Army, and in particular the Infantry, recruits from amongst the most disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds; such areas of social deprivation and higher crime have long been associated with a subsequent higher rate of offending, irrespective of any impact of military service.³⁰² This group has been trained in the application of violence in their military service, and clearly some have struggled to restrain those impulses once out of the military environment. The application of this training in a civilian context can be devastating.

The full breakdown of offences committed by those in prison as relayed in the 2010 DASA study can be seen in the table below. As can be seen, violence against the person is the dominant conviction, along with sexual offences (which can also be violent), which occur at more than double the rate for those with military experience than for civilians.

Table 5.2: A comparison of the number of former members of the Armed Forces in prison to the general prison population in England and Wales, by offence³⁰³

Offence type	Number of former members of the UK Armed Forces (%)	General prison population number (%)
Violence against the person	725 (32.9%)	23,394 (28.6%)
Sexual Offences	546 (24.7%)	8,900 (10.9%)
Drug Offences	236 (10.7%)	12,615 (15.4%)
Robbery	158 (7.2%)	10,480 (12.8%)
Burglary	87 (3.9%)	9,370 (11.5%)
Theft and handling	52 (2.4%)	4,313 (5.3%)
Fraud and forgery	30 (1.4%)	2,341 (2.9%)
Motoring Offences	15 (0.7%)	1,278 (1.6%)
Other Offences	198 (9.0%)	8,059 (9.8%)
Offences not recorded	160 (7.3%)	1,081 (1.3%)
Total	2,207 (100%)	81,831 (100%)

300 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010

301 MacManus D. et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

302 Johnstone J, 'Social Class, Social Areas and Delinquency', *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 63, No. 1, pp49–72, 1978

303 DASA Health International, *Estimating the proportion of prisoners in England and Wales who are ex-Armed Forces – further analysis*, London: Ministry of Defence, September 2010

The differentiating factor in violent offending in particular between ex-military prisoners and civilians are combat experience and the pre-service background of the individual. Pre-service background, for example, has a direct influence on sexual offences.

For violent offending, there is a direct correlation with deployment to combat zones. Those service personnel who have seen combat in Iraq and Afghanistan are more than twice as likely to commit a violent offence as those who have occupied non-frontline roles.³⁰⁴ In addition, experiences of combat and trauma during deployment were identified as being strongly associated with violent behaviour following homecoming after an operational deployment.³⁰⁵ Alcohol plays a major role in these crimes, with 44 per cent of violent crimes in one study having been committed by those suffering from alcohol misuse.³⁰⁶

The Armed Forces' have been engaged in active operations in Iraq and Afghanistan for more than ten years, meaning that an increased number of service personnel have been exposed to a larger number of traumatic events with greater frequency than in previous decades. As such, the potential clearly exists for a substantial rise in incarcerated veterans in the future – particularly as the current data suggest that offences take place several years after discharge from the military as other negative aspects of transition take effect.

Significantly, the roots of this violence have also been linked to the pre-existing risk factors, such as early antisocial behaviour or social and economic disadvantage in childhood, with 19 per cent of those in the Armed Forces who commit a violent offence also having a record of pre-service violent offending.³⁰⁷ Exposure to direct combat exacerbates this and increases violent offending. In the military, this is a role traditionally fulfilled by the Infantry, which is composed predominately of those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such personnel are more likely to commit violent offences, and are therefore doubly adversely affected post-deployment.³⁰⁸

Violence is inextricably linked to military service, and the preponderance of former soldiers in contact with the criminal justice system in England and Wales may well suggest an enduring pattern of behaviour that is in part established by service in the military. Military training cultivates a certain form of behaviour, and certain responses to stimuli. As Mickey, a repeat offender who has been in and out of prison multiple times told the CSJ: 'The Army is a way of life. When you come out and you can't find anything else, you fall back on instinct. And that means you fight.'

It is possible that some offences are the result of undiagnosed mental health problems amongst former members of the Armed Forces, in particular alcohol misuse. A 2013 study noted 'a strong association between post-deployment mental health problems and subsequent violent offending, particularly alcohol misuse and post-traumatic stress disorder' given typical behaviour on returning from deployment and the state of hyper-arousal that typically follows

304 MacManus D et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

305 Ibid

306 Ibid

307 Ibid

308 House of Commons Defence Select Committee, *Duty of Care: Third Report of Session 2004–05: Volume 2, oral and Written Evidence*, London: House of Commons, 2005

combat exposure.³⁰⁹ Poor mental health through symptoms such as alcohol misuse, or other causes of social exclusion such as unemployment (with its implicated financial problems) and homelessness have also been identified as major drivers of crime.³¹⁰ Such factors are often not considered when it comes to sentencing.

5.4 The Government's current response

As part of the support for former service personnel within the criminal justice system, the Ex-Service Offenders Working Group (ESOWG) aims to ensure that the ex-service prison and probation offender population, their families and the resettlement services, are fully informed of the support available from the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA). It is a non-executive, collaborative group comprised of representatives from charities and civil servants that reports to both the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice, each of whom reports to their respective Ministers.

As part of the wider governmental policy for reducing the risk of reoffending, this support and assistance applies during imprisonment in addition to pre and post discharge. It is also designed to ensure a common and collaborative approach to veterans in the criminal justice system across the UK, including coordination, communication and effective working practices between all the major stakeholders. Members include the



departmental representatives from the MoJ and the MoD, charities such as The Royal British Legion, Combat Stress, SSAFA Forces Help and Nacro, as well as other agencies such as the Liaison Officers from the Scottish and Northern Ireland Prison Services and the Centre for Mental Health.

The objectives for the ESOWG include the production of accurate statistics on the numbers of former service personnel who are in the prison population and on probation, as well as monitoring any changes to identify trends including those prisons that have a higher proportion of military service leaves. This will also allow the group to tailor support for veterans around specific issues, such as mental health. The charities that make up the Working Group also conduct prison visits and provide feedback of their experiences, and any areas of concern are reported directly to the MoJ and MoD so that ministers are kept informed.

The delivery of these services inside prisons, that could potentially offer so much to vulnerable individuals, varies greatly across the UK and is limited and sporadic. The most constructive support in these institutions was, in the most part, the result of passionate individuals or that provided by prison staff. In one prison the CSJ visited, staff had under their own initiative

309 MacManus D. et al, 'Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Lancet*, 381, 2013, pp907–17

310 MacManus D, and Wessely S, 'Why do some ex-armed forces personnel end up in prison?', *British Medical Journal*, 342, 2011

established a support group for veterans involving peer led discussion with other incarcerated ex-military personnel, before handing over responsibility to Catch-22 to administer on a case-by-case basis.

There is a need for these services to be improved and co-ordinated in a more effective manner to help reduce future reoffending and a repetition of poor outcomes. Mandy Bostwick, a Trauma Psychotherapist who is a specialist in the field and who has for many years worked within the criminal justice system supporting veterans, told the CSJ that:

'The provision of support for the specific needs for veterans in custody by the major charities is severely lacking across the UK. Many veterans are receiving no support for complex issues such as mental health problems that could prevent their successful reintegration once they have served their sentence and are released.'

Case study: Richard's story

Richard joined the Army aged 16 and served for 21 years, during which time he completed eight operational tours.

On his last tour in Iraq he was injured in an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attack that left him severely injured. He spent three years in rehabilitation, after which he was discharged as 60 per cent disabled: 'I wanted to stay in, but the arm and leg just wouldn't heal. I didn't want to leave the Army – it's your family and everything – but I couldn't stay.'

Due to his extensive injuries, Richard suffered several problems in his personal life and ended up living with his mother. Transition was difficult: 'Once you're in the Army it's fantastic, but once you've left, that's it. Nothing. No support, no direction.' His mental health also began to deteriorate after leaving the Army:

'You don't really take account of that when you're in the Army. You don't really realise the impact of what you've been through until you're away from that familiar environment and your mates, but at that point you're on your own so it can be pretty rough.'

Three years after he was discharged from the Army with exemplary character references, Richard was involved in an incident in a pub. He stepped in to stop a fight, and shortly afterwards was attacked. He defended himself, and after the fight called the police. He was arrested and placed in custody.

When he appeared before a judge, his military service actually countered against him, rather than being taken into account. He was told he should have exercised more control, and that after his military training was potentially dangerous. He was remanded in custody and spent seven-and-a-half months in prison.

Whilst in prison, Richard made contact with other ex-Armed Forces personnel, both those serving sentences and those working as prison officers, and heard about the veterans in custody support programme that had been set up. He volunteered and became an orderly, helping to organise the meetings and provide support for new inmates who had served in the military when they first arrived:

'Prison can be a scary place the first time you go in. Being able to talk to somebody who knows what you're going through, especially if you've been in the Forces, means a lot and really helps. Someone who hasn't served just can't provide that same level of support.'

As an orderly, he helped provide support for new prisoners with a military background, along with organising meetings for those already serving sentences, allowing them to provide peer-to-peer support.

Richard had only sporadic contact with any of the major military charities that are supposed to work with veterans in custody whilst he was in prison, and in particular criticised the lack of mental health support on offer. The support that was offered was under a system driven by passionate and concerned individuals, rather than formal structures run by charities.

Whilst in custody, a different judge reviewed his case, however, and was far more sympathetic to what had happened, and took into account Richard's strong references from his regiment. He was ordered to be released and placed under supervision, but due to a technical foul-up in the probation service remained in prison for two months longer than he should have.

When he was released, he was discharged with just £46 and told to report to probation. Despite being an Armed Forces veteran, and therefore liable for priority help from his local authority as part of the Covenant, this has not been forthcoming, and response has been slow due to his criminal record. This has put Richard at risk of homelessness: 'If I hadn't got my mum, I'd be on the streets. I'd have nothing to survive on.' Overall, Richard's impression of the Armed Forces Covenant and its implementation has been limited: 'They just don't seem to understand what it means and what I need.'

Richard continues his work as a mentor to support ex-Armed Forces personnel who are still serving their sentences, visiting the prison where he served regularly. While this support is vital, he told the CSJ that it can be difficult for ex-military personnel to ask for help:

'It's a pride thing. I don't ask anybody for anything. It took me a long time to ask for help. I left my regiment with a glowing reference. I don't want to go back and tell them that I've been on the scrap heap.'

5.5 Future responses

In the UK there are currently no plans to adopt US-style practices of providing an alternate veterans' stream within the criminal justice system, as have been instigated in the United States, where some military veterans are tried in separate courts. Following the opening of the first veteran's court in 2008 in Buffalo, New York, cities in 28 states have opened 166 courts. Such courts preside over non-violent crimes, and are designed to rehabilitate veterans by diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system by facilitating their re-integration and successful resumption of a civilian life through supervised drug and alcohol rehabilitation.³¹¹

Such a model has been suggested as a possibility for the UK previously.³¹² Our view, however, is that it would be better for the long-term social and economic integration of veterans to be handled by civilian agencies – given that service leavers become civilians as soon as they leave the military. The predominant crimes committed by service personnel are extremely

311 Russell R, *Buffalo Veterans Court and Veterans Mentor Handbook*, Buffalo: Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, 2010 [accessed via http://www.buffaloveteranscourt.org/sites/g/files/g283702/f/Mentor%20Handbook_0.pdf (04/11/13)]

312 Howard League for Penal Reform, *Leave No Veteran Behind: The Inquiry into Former Armed Service Personnel in Prison visits to the United States of America*, London: Howard League for Penal Reform, 2010

serious, involving violent or sexual offences. Such crimes are too serious to be treated differently within the criminal justice system in England and Wales. Removing them would create disadvantage and special treatment for ex-military, which could be unpalatable to the wider UK public.

However, greater understanding of the problems faced by ex-Armed Forces personnel, particularly in relation to alcohol abuse, is important when dealing with less serious criminality. The CSJ continues to explore the possibility of specific drug and alcohol courts as part of its criminal justice work.³¹³ A specific ex-forces programme of education and awareness amongst staff and magistrates within these, and the wider criminal justice system, would be worthwhile, and similar to that being recommended to take place within the NHS in relation to mental health and alcohol. There should be no separation of crimes based on types of offender; civilian or veteran, but a separation based on type of offence. Such a separation for petty and minor crimes that involve drugs or alcohol, where community orders would be more constructive in the long-term than short custodial sentences, can deliver better long-term outcomes for all, both civilian and veteran.

For those ex-service personnel who are given custodial sentences, the CSJ does not believe there is a need to follow the United States in having dedicated wings for ex-military personnel, as can be found in the states of Georgia and Florida.³¹⁴ Whilst the provision of specialist support for issues such as mental health is important, the CSJ recommends that more work is done to deliver better services within existing structures, in particular for what remains a small population. Whilst it is important that former members of the Armed Forces continue to receive the necessary support, there is no need to house them in specialist facilities that would further segregate them, as well as instigate a new programme that would incur significant costs.

5.6 Conclusion

There is one particular group of service leavers that are vulnerable to committing crime and entering prison. Young soldiers from the Army with combat experience, who grew up with substantial adversity and achieved low educational qualifications, are more susceptible to criminality and the committing of violent crime. The number of ex-Armed Forces personnel in UK prisons is growing, and likely to increase further given the extended operations that have taken place and involved UK troops since 2001.

There is a real need to identify those who exhibit signs of such vulnerability ahead of transition support. One way in which the risk of criminality can be reduced is to improve access to employment, housing, and alcohol counselling immediately upon discharge. Whilst it is inevitable that some ex-service personnel will commit crime, early and constructive

313 Centre for Social Justice, *Breakthrough Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

314 Virginia Department of Corrections, Press Release, *Officials to Join Incarcerated veterans to Showcase New vets' Dorm at Haynesville Correctional Centre*, 5 November 2012 [accessed via http://vadoc.virginia.gov/resources/news/12nov05_haynesvillevets.shtm (23/10/13)] and Florida Department of Corrections, Press Release, *Florida Department of Corrections Opens Five Veteran's Dormitories*, 9 November 2011 [accessed via: <http://www.dc.state.fl.us/secretary/press/2011/11-09VetDorms.html> (23/10/13)]

interventions and an integrated approach to creating better transitions can prevent the social dislocation that can otherwise lead to criminality. For those ex-service personnel who are incarcerated, it is vital that charitable services support them and help them transition back into society following their release from the prison, support which is for the most part currently lacking, so that they do not re-offend and enter a cycle of criminality.

chapter six

Doing our duty: recommendations for effective transition

Recommendations for leadership and governance

1. Link data between MoD, MoJ and DWP

It is essential that policy-makers have access to accurate data about veterans when forming future policy. At present there is no link between the data MoD holds on veterans and the information held by the DWP and the MoJ. This means that it is impossible to know for certain how many former service personnel are either in employment or in contact with the criminal justice system.



A link between MoD and DWP data sets would offer the first conclusive picture of how former members of the Armed Forces were faring in the jobs market or if in it at all. Analysis of this data could reveal any patterns of long-term or repetitive unemployment and allow Jobcentres and government to explore how to make constructive policy on how to better get service leavers into work.

Similarly a link between MoD and MoJ would allow government to monitor how many former service personnel are in prison or on community sentences at any one time.

Such a data link up is possible, and we consider it essential in order to prioritise finite resources to those who need the most support in the transition process, and provide definitive support to current anecdotal evidence and qualitative research.

2. Defining ‘veterans’ as those who completed operational training

Bound up in this extension of support is the definition of the phrase “veteran.” Currently, the Government defines veterans as any who have served a day in the UK Armed Forces – the most inclusive of any country.

This CSJ contends that the phrase “veteran” should only be applied to those who are on the trained strength, i.e. have completed operational training and joined their first unit. This is not to detract from those who have not, nor to remove resources away from them. The CSJ envisions that the widespread adoption of the Future Horizons model will cater for the small number that fail to graduate from basic training and signpost them to the relevant services. The re-designation of veterans, however, to all on the trained strength will allow the fairer application of finite resources.

Significantly, it will also provide an opportunity for a more personal, tailored service for service leavers, which Future Horizons has already shown to be effective in its pilot with ESLs. The contract for providing transition services within the Armed Forces is due for renewal, with the new arrangement beginning in 2015. Now is the ideal time to specify a new approach to be incorporated into the delivery of these services, one that is designed to be capable of helping those service leavers who otherwise struggle the most.

3. A Veterans Ombudsman: making the Armed Forces Covenant work

Delivering and ensuring easy access to all of the services needed by the ex-Armed Forces community and their dependants is a role that supersedes one government department.

Currently, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans is based in the MoD, and it is from there that the Minister must try and ensure the correct implementation of the Armed Forces Covenant and provide support to service leavers encountering difficulties. However, it is predominately in interaction with the responsibilities of other governmental departments, and agencies like the Jobcentre Plus or the NHS, that difficulties occur. As such, having responsibility for their welfare confined within the MoD is ineffective.

Despite well-intentioned efforts, many service leavers are still struggling to access support and overcome disadvantages gained through their military service, despite assertions to the contrary within the Armed Forces Covenant. Therefore, there is a clear need for an independent Veterans Ombudsman to ensure that veterans and service leavers and their families are treated in accordance with the outcomes stipulated within the Armed Forces Covenant, and receive the services that they require in a fair and efficient manner. This would ensure that it is more than just political rhetoric and delivers what ex-service personnel need in their local communities. The Veterans Ombudsman would sit outside of any government department, but report directly to the Cabinet.

The CSJ envisions that the UK Veterans Ombudsman would follow the successful Canadian model, and also the Australian example, with the responsibility and power to identify failings in the current delivery of Covenant services and have these acted upon.

The Ombudsman would also be able to act as a single point of contact for ex-service personnel for whatever issues they are experiencing in civilian life that are hindering successful transition, directing them to local state services or charities to help deal with their needs. This would provide clear direction in an otherwise cluttered landscape of information and advice, the successful navigation of which the CSJ has learned is extremely daunting and difficult for some service leavers.

The Ombudsman would also be able to offer advice to local service providers about what it is that they should be offering the current and ex-Armed Forces community in their local area and oversee the application of community covenants, which the CSJ has learned is also complicating the transition process.

Enshrining the Armed Forces Covenant in law would also ensure that it delivers practical and effective results to those who need support. Politically it would demonstrate the utmost commitment to Armed Forces veterans. It would also give the Ombudsman the strongest possible backing to be able to call those failing to deliver the services envisioned in the Covenant to account, making the role far stronger and more effective.

4. Identifying veterans: Jobcentre Plus

The CSJ would also recommend that the question “Have you served in the UK Armed Forces?” be added as an obligatory question to the registration form for all new claimants at Jobcentre Plus which cannot be bypassed. Making this question part of the registration will help ensure that Jobcentres away from the regional base of the Armed Forces Champion are aware of the veterans seeking work in their area and direct them to appropriate support services.

One of these support services could include mentoring from former service personnel who have already been through the transition process. The establishment of a mentoring programme for those service personnel who have recently been discharged should be explored by the Ministry of Defence in partnership with local authorities and the major charities such as the Royal British Legion or SSAFA. The commonality of military experience, preferably in the same service arm (ex-Army with recently-discharged Army, for example), is essential and can provide informal support and advice that the service leaver would not be willing to ask of civilians.

5. Improving mental health

The CSJ recognises that important advancements have been made in the area of mental health care for the Armed Forces, both those who have served and those who currently do so. It is important that such issues have mainstream backing, and that a commitment has been made to redress the failures and weaknesses of the previous services, as identified in the Murrison report.³¹⁵ Improved mental health assessment at discharge is one such improvement that deserves recognition.

³¹⁵ Andrew Murrison MD MP, *Fighting Fit: a mental health plan for servicemen and veterans*, London: Ministry of Defence, 2010

However, more work is still required to deliver a better service in this regard. This report has highlighted how this needs to be done, and echoes the need to deliver improved capabilities and access to mental health services across the UK, not only for the Armed Forces community but for the rest of the population.

There is no need for a specific veterans' mental health programme that is separate from the NHS. Whilst the Armed Forces community may require a specific type of service, it already exists amongst the wider civilian population; it is not unique to that cohort. With no unique demands, therefore, there is no need for a specific service that would cater to less than 10 per cent of the population.³¹⁶

Instead, the quality and accessibility of services within the NHS should be improved across the board for all patients, not just those with a military background. However, as the CSJ has previously argued, mainstream services must be attentive to specific military needs, such as trauma-related conditions.³¹⁷ This can be achieved through better education and awareness within health services of the specific military cultural values and issues.

Alcohol abuse is a major example of this. Currently, NHS treatment for mental health conditions is not offered if the patient also exhibits signs alcohol abuse until that alcoholism has been resolved. However, as this report and others have shown, alcohol is a major aspect of mental ill-health amongst former service personnel and a common aspect of co-morbidity. In order to improve the quality of mental health services available to the ex-military cohort, such a factor must be taken into account. A specific co-morbidity programme must be established.

The provision of services through community mental health teams is also essential. The CSJ has learned that there is a real need for services to be available within the local community, and the NHS remains the best vehicle for delivering these. Community mental health teams can be responsive to the local area in which they operate. For example, this means that an area such as the South West, otherwise isolated from the services offered by the major charities but with a large ex-service population, can develop their team accordingly, and hire specific staff to treat clients from this sub-group.

Within the Armed Forces, further work needs to be done to reduce the stigma surrounding mental ill-health and therefore encourage those who have developed problems whilst still in uniform seek early and effective help. The consequences of suppressing such issues have been made clear to the CSJ and related in this report, and it is clear that untreated mental health issues whilst in uniform contribute directly to poor transition.

³¹⁶ It should also be noted that the specific age demographic of this population means that the proportion of British society that has served in the British Armed Forces is due to fall further in future years.

³¹⁷ Centre for Social Justice, *Completing the Revolution: Transforming Mental Health and Tackling Poverty*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2011

6. Tackling addiction: improved signposting and services

The British Armed Forces have a commendably robust anti-drug policy. However, the relationship between the Armed Forces and alcohol remains problematic.

Steps have been taken to limit the high consumption of alcohol within the British Armed Forces but this remains a difficult issue. Culturally, alcohol remains very significant within the military. Harmful drinking whilst in uniform can establish a pattern of behaviour that is difficult to shake, and contributes to poor transition. Alcohol Concern identified that many alcohol treatment services already have armed forces clients, and noted that there is 'clearly considerable scope for improved and increased joint working between local alcohol treatment agencies, the armed forces, and the various statutory and voluntary agencies supporting veterans.'³¹⁸

In mental health, huge advances have been made through the instigation of the TRiM system, with trained practitioners in units providing peer support and a first level of triage diagnosis. A similar practice could be adopted in specific relation to alcohol, in particular in those units whose members are more vulnerable to developing problematic relationships with alcohol. The data exists to show that those deployed in combat roles and exposed to hostile action are at greater risk. As such, any increased level in alcohol consumption that endures in the post-deployment period can be flagged and addressed by a peer.

For those who are believed to be engaged in hazardous levels of drinking, a short discussion can be held with the service person to outline the health impacts surrounding problematic drinking, as well as direct them to further information on the subject. Good practice would be to conduct a follow-up review in order to check if and how the service person has changed their behaviour. For severe alcohol misuse, then good practice would involve conducting a mental health assessment, as studies have shown that co-morbid mental health problems are common in such cases. Pilot studies have already shown that such an approach, factoring in simple, general questions as part of a mental health assessment, can prove effective. This would allow practitioners to make informed decisions based on individual circumstances.³¹⁹

To provide effective treatment for Armed Forces personnel engaged in harmful drinking, all 15 UK Departments of Community Mental Health (DCMH) teams must in future be funded to provide alcohol programmes.

This process of early intervention can be used to divert the service person to the relevant treatment, offered by an increased Defence Medical Services or, if exiting the forces, to the relevant NHS or third sector treatment programme.

For this to be effective, current NHS capabilities towards alcohol addiction must be improved. Previous CSJ work has highlighted how the NHS is currently under-resourced

³¹⁸ Alcohol Concern, *On the Front Line: Alcohol Concern Cymru Briefing*, Cardiff: Alcohol Concern, 2012

³¹⁹ Aguirre M et al, 'Alcohol consumption in the UK armed forces. Are we drinking too much?', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, 2013 [accessed via <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/kcmhr/publications/assetfiles/2013/Aguirre2013b.pdf> (15/01/14)]

to tackle the enormous alcohol problem within British society effectively.³²⁰ The NHS must also improve its alcohol treatment capacity through increased resources. The CSJ has long advocated a per unit 'treatment tax' to lower alcohol consumption and to pay for services to combat addiction.³²¹ As with NHS mental health treatment services, additional training amongst practitioners must be provided to improve awareness and education so that better engagement can be made with ex-military users whose alcohol and/or drug addictions have reached crisis point. Information about NHS services and relevant third sector organisations can also be included as part of the discharge briefing for exiting service personnel.

The CSJ has also heard anecdotally of an increase in the use of "legal highs" amongst the Armed Forces community. Such a new cultural activity needs to be explored fully, and the CSJ would urge further research into the extent of legal high use in the British Armed Forces so that policy response can be formulated in response to this new development.

7. An Armed Forces Credit Union

The CSJ strongly believes that the establishment of an Armed Forces Credit Union is necessary. We have heard how debt can be an issue for some service leavers so it is important that a financial institution reflects and is responsive to and understanding of the idiosyncratic needs of current and former service personnel. The ability to offer tailored financial products to the current and ex-Armed Forces community is also important, a need not currently met by the mainstream financial providers within the UK.

These can offset the difficulty in finding credit from civilian banks that have been experienced by the UK military community, providing lower-cost credit for anything from mortgages to business or employment loans, all of which can be used to improve the transition experience. This should be partially modelled on the US's Navy Federal Credit Union and the UK Police Credit Union.

The Forces in Mind Trust has recommended that a saving scheme be instigated by the Armed Forces.³²² The CSJ believes that an Armed Forces credit union could help finance mortgages to help servicemen and women secure stable, long-term accommodation. This will provide the base for them to go on and secure jobs, access local health and other services so as to facilitate their transition. The credit union could also provide business loans, or loans with which to undertake courses as part of professional development.

The MoD, DWP and the Association of British Credit Unions Limited (ABCUL) have already expressed interest in the establishment of an Armed Forces Credit Union and are discussing its viability with the CSJ and others.

320 Centre for Social Justice, *No Quick Fix: Exposing the depth of Britain's drug and alcohol problem*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2013

321 Centre for Social Justice, *Addictions: towards recovery*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2007

322 Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

Recommendations for training and support

8. Continuous Personal Development: basic educational qualifications

As this report has shown, far too many service people lack the basic qualifications which act as a gateway to future employment opportunities.

In line with new plans for civilians, and to ensure that members of the Armed Forces are not disadvantaged by their military service as stated in the Armed Forces Covenant, the MoD should seek to ensure that all members of the Armed Forces have achieved an A*–C grade in GCSE English and Maths after four years of service. The registration of all service personnel on standard and enhanced learning schemes should also become mandatory and overseen at a brigade, rather than battalion, level.

The provision of these skills will be advantageous in helping them gain the knowledge foundation to move on and undertake more rigorous courses whilst still in uniform that will ensure their employment prospects are not constrained due to a lack of academic skills.

Such learning needs to be done whilst in uniform. The difficulty in tracking service leavers in the UK, and their spread across the country means that any effort to implement such a strategy after they have been discharged will be met with a poor attendance rate even if data systems can be improved.

The current application and success of apprenticeships and education schemes varies greatly dependent on unit culture, and often the commitment of individual senior officers. This process is not uniform across the military, and as such the quality of the results is not equal across the forces. Whilst excellent for the technical arms, apprenticeships are somewhat limited for infantry personnel and those with limited educational skills – the group that often struggle the most in transition. Such efforts need to be centralised and become a more effective system that is accessible to all, with improved academic learning placed alongside vocational education.

With the draw down in active operations in Afghanistan, current strategic changes and the plans for the New Employment Model, the ability to base Army troops within a central UK location for a longer-term deployment than in previous generations represents an opportunity like never before. With large concentrations of troops requiring such support in the same locations, such learning can be factored into everyday military service in a way not previously possible.

British society is changing and to keep up the Armed Forces must also evolve in its practices. Currently, some members of the British military are being severely disadvantaged in the long-term by being taken out of the education system and placed in uniform.

The benefits of such a commitment, in both recruiting and retention terms, but also future financial savings through a reduced welfare bill, provide ample motivation for such a policy to be enacted.

9. Extension of full transition support to all on the trained strength

The current support offered in transition does not adequately accommodate the needs of all those in uniform. The current system rewards length of service instead of prioritising need, yet all previous research has shown that it is those who serve for the shortest period of time who struggle the most in transition.

Currently, troops which are designated as Early Service Leavers encompass all of those who serve four years or less and are not entitled to full transition support. However, many ESLs have been deployed on operational duties on more than one occasion. Presently they are treated the same as those recruits who have failed to make it through training.

The CSJ recommends the extension of employment and other support offered to transitioning service personnel to all of those on the trained strength, regardless of length of service.

10. Enhancing transition training

The extension of the full transition support package to all of those on the trained strength of the Armed Forces will improve employment outcomes. However, there are also several ways that the current transition services can be improved further:

- A simple numeracy and literacy test for all Other Ranks at an early stage in their discharge process would allow those who need it to be directed to services to bring their basic skills up to scratch.
- The option for automatic enrolment on the Work Programme for those leaving the Armed Forces who are found to have poor general skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, would also ensure that these individuals are given tailored and intensive support sooner rather than later.
- Better instruction and advice on how to navigate the welfare system, and what services should be made available by staff at the Jobcentre Plus or local authority to the individual as an ex-serviceman.
- Whilst the current provision of four or eight weeks of CTP provides enough time to gain a qualification, it is not enough time for service leavers to become suitably experienced so that they can realistically compete for roles against civilians who have direct experience of filling the role. The CSJ would also recommend the use of mandatory work placements as part of the transition process to help bridge the initial cultural gap between the military and civilian worlds, and to bring employers to the military and a potential workforce, rather than service leavers having to seek employers out. This would also help to dispel the idea that those who have served in the military are institutionalised or inadapttable.
- Qualifications gained in the military should be able to be exchanged for their civilian equivalent. The CSJ has learned that many civilian employers only recognise civilian qualifications. If service leavers could trade in their military qualifications for the civilian

equivalents they would be saved from having to take additional qualifications and incurs costs to themselves, and would find it easier to gain employment.

- Structurally, the CSJ has also learned that issues at unit level are preventing some eligible service leavers engaging with the CTP. It currently remains difficult for those units tasked with conducting operational training to divert costs and manpower to transition for their service leavers, despite it being an entitlement. The CSJ has heard that some units are blocking applications on these grounds and some service leavers are forsaking transition support. Consequently we recommend that applications for resettlement time and the funds to travel should be made to an independent body within the MoD rather than the unit. In addition, the CSJ would argue that resettlement time should be made mandatory – i.e. effectively become a posting – so as to remove service leavers from other pressures that otherwise block them from attending courses.
- The money for training courses should be increased. That the Individual Resettlement Training Costs (IRTC) has not been increased for 20 years, and is now worth 42 per cent less in real terms, must be corrected. This will broaden access to a variety of courses outside of those offered by the CTP, providing greater choice and freedom.

With the contract for supplying transition services due to be reviewed, now is the perfect time for improved, more personalised and inclusive transition services to be incorporated into future bids that have the potential to deliver better outcomes for service leavers.

11. Helping service leavers find housing

Stable, secure housing is vital for physical and emotional well-being, but the absence can result in extremely complex problems. There is a major housing issue affecting the whole of the UK which the CSJ is currently investigating. It is this lack of supply combined with high demand that is presenting a major issue.

The Armed Forces Covenant makes provision for former members of the Forces to be given additional priority points on social housing lists, and negates the previous hurdle of a “local connection” that would otherwise exclude them. However, in areas of high demand, and given that many discharged service personnel are young and otherwise healthy, this still may not be enough to secure them long-term housing.

The issue of housing should play a larger role in the transition process. It should be asked as standard as part of the discharge process where a person is going to live once they leave the military. If there is any doubt, or a vague answer given about finding a place with friends, then the individual should be informed of what services are available to them in that area, both those supplied by local authorities and charities. By asking the question, the service leaver will be forced to confront the issue prior to leaving the military and will, it is hoped, be able to make suitable provision.

Prior to discharge, the role of the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO) should also be stressed, and more resources given to it in order to increase the number of briefings

offered. With the re-basing of the Army in the UK by 2018, the opportunity to reach an increased number of the Armed Forces more regularly presents itself.

Fortunately, the percentage of the current UK homeless population that is ex-Armed Forces has fallen. However, the CSJ has learned that many service leavers who are discharged from the forces are presented with the choice of having to rely on the hospitality of friends or return to the broken homes, disruptive environments and social deprivation that many chose to leave when joining the military purely in order to put a roof over their heads for lack of an alternative. To improve this process, the CSJ would recommend that those former members of the Armed Forces who do not own their own home and are faced with no definitive destination of where to live at their point of discharge and do not have a job to take up struggling to house themselves can be designated as statutory homeless if they request to do so. Adding ex-Armed Forces personnel to the statutory homeless list will force councils to provide housing for those service personnel to provide them with essential stability when they leave the forces. By enacting this change, part of the commitment to supporting former members of the Armed Forces as envisioned by the Community Covenants, that minority of former members of the military who are presented with a lack of suitable options for housing will be able to receive help and be housed by their local council. Such a policy should apply whether it is immediately after discharge or several years into their post-military lives.

12. Including families

Families provide vital support during transition, and should be better involved in the process.³²³ The stability provided by positive and supportive family units and domestic relationships can have positive effects on many of the other aspects of transition, and help insulate the individual from other negative life events.

Transition affects everyone within a family unit, not just the family member in uniform. However, a study of the experience of military spouses and children, and specific provisions for their welfare in transition, has been mostly neglected from the debates surrounding transition. The CSJ plans future work into conducting a review of military families in transition, and aims to explore how they are supported, and currently failed, by the current provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant and other policies.

³²³ Forces in Mind Trust, *The Transition Mapping Study: Understanding the transition process for Service personnel returning to civilian life*, London: Forces in Mind Trust, 2013

Conclusion

The vast majority of men and women leaving the Armed Forces enter into civilian life without difficulty, find work and contribute to society. This report has been concerned with the small but significant minority who struggle to find work or housing, who battle alcoholism or mental health issues, or who find themselves on the wrong side of the law.

As has been shown, the root causes of these problems are often the same and lie in experiences veterans have had before they entered the Armed Forces. Too often poor educational outcomes lead to poor employment opportunities. Too often people return from service to areas with few housing opportunities.

But there are also problems that arise from, or are exacerbated by active service. A culture of heavy drinking in the forces may lead to dependence on alcohol following it. Mental health problems may be triggered or worsened by operational experience. Alcohol use and mental ill-health lead some to commit violent crime.

These are complex issues which the Armed Forces and wider government already do much to combat. However, there is a great deal more to be done. It is vital that opportunities to make potentially vulnerable service personnel more resilient are not missed. In particular the most vulnerable – those who have had difficult childhoods, leave early and young, and are exposed to combat – deserve more support. This means giving them access to education whilst they are in uniform and better transition training when they are preparing to leave. It means better monitoring for mental health and alcohol problems, and better treatment when such problems arise. And it means ensuring that the Armed Forces Covenant is adhered to.

It would be impossible to prevent all the aspects of poor transition. Personal responsibility on the behalf of the service leaver must exist, and insulation from the negative aspects of life is impossible, despite the best intentions and well delivered services. However, it is possible to equip service leavers with the skills and help them overcome disadvantage so that they are able to make better choices, and help them better insulate themselves from negative life events later on.

It is vital that the Government acts quickly to instigate these recommendations to help and protect both those who have already left service and those who will leave it soon. With the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, and the planned reduction in size of the Armed Forces,

public interest in the plight of the military may diminish. The public and political will that currently exists must be seized upon to make sure that the UK serves our Armed Forces personnel as well as they have served it.



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