



South Yorkshire Employer Insights on the Employability landscape for Veterans and Service Leavers Research Report Headlines

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Research Background

Background

- Seventh and final in a series of employer insights
- Purpose - to gain employer knowledge and understanding of local skills priorities
- Questionnaire - agreed with providers and stakeholders
- This report looks at the employability landscape for Veterans and Service leavers
 - We spoke to 29 consultees in 1-2-1 interviews— they can't represent the whole sector and offer a snapshot of their requirements
 - Designed to inform the valuable work and thinking of local stakeholders

Background (cont.)

- According to Government estimates there in 2021 there were 42,500 people in South Yorkshire who had previously served in the UK regular armed forces, reserve armed forces or both. These individuals possess a broad range of skills such as communication, problem solving and teamworking skills. These skills are transferable to all sectors and roles, particularly to positions in management and leadership.
- This is not unknown to businesses and research undertaken for the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) this year found that 85% of UK businesses that have employed veterans agreed that former armed force personnel can play a significant role in filling national skills gaps and 86% agreed that veterans have the requisite skills for high performance management positions.
- Despite this Service leavers face a number of challenges and barriers both in the context of the transition from service and into employment. A similar survey conducted by OVA found that only 43% of service leavers felt prepared to leave the armed forces.



Employability benefits and barriers

Employability benefits and barriers

1. In 2021 there were 42,500 in South Yorkshire people who had previously served in the UK regular armed forces, reserve armed forces or both.
2. 85% of UK firms employing veterans agreed they can play a key role filling skills gaps. 86% say they have skills suited high performance management and leadership positions.
3. They demonstrate exceptional soft skills which are invaluable and easily transferable to most civilian roles. With strong communication, problem solving skills, teamwork and proactivity skills they offer a positive workforce impact and role models to others.
4. Alongside the skills and attributes employers cited altruistic motivations for their recruitment, though some found it hard to translate military skills to civilian roles.

Employability benefits and barriers (cont.)

5. This skills translation is not always well understood or recognised, both by service leavers and prospective employers. Over two thirds over leavers experienced difficulties in seeing how their skills could relate to a new career.
6. There is often a mismatch with skills recognised by employers and the roles and pay offered. This can be compounded poor qualification alignment necessitating some transition support. There are tools and resources to assist with this process.
7. The challenges by leavers are multi-faceted. These range from cultural and identity adjustments, practical and financial challenges, skills and employability barriers to the well reported issues around mental health and wellbeing. These can extend to their wider family and often service leavers are not seeking support early enough.
8. An employer challenge is overcoming sub-conscious biases or unfounded concerns for instance around the ability to integrate or behavioural or mental health prejudices.

Employability benefits and barriers

Service Leaver skill sets

“I think the first one is pragmatic problem solving. The number of times that we are on exercise, doing particular tasks and there's always a challenge. You always come up against problems or issues or circumstances that you've not come across before. One of the greatest skills that a service leaver would bring to any business is their ability to think differently and solve problems in a way that's going to still achieve the end outcome.”

Barriers

“The biggest problem service leavers have is the language used in the military that then comes across to the civilian world. I was a gunner; I fired missiles and big guns. Not much call for that in the civilian world. But the skills and ability needed to do my job translates to a lot of what I do now. I am completely focused on organising things and making things happen and attention to detail is what is delivered at the end of the day



The transition from service

The transition from service

1. Awareness of the Government's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) varied and for those who knew it, attitudes were mixed. Veterans typically found the service less helpful than employers who generally liked the events but there is more to be done to make these impactful. For those leaving service CTP offer is seen as quite generic and not tailored to individual aspirations with a lack of diverse pathways into work and careers.
2. Ten organisations discussed the need for more signposting between services to enhance continuity including greater collaboration between charities, training providers, employment support providers and employers.
3. Mental health community support is vital but at present underprovided. The ability of peer support groups help service leavers adjust to civilian life is important with loneliness and a loss of community highlighted as two key factors that influence well-being.
4. Just under half of interviewees discussed the importance of broader employment support that goes beyond training and qualifications including schools, flexible work practices etc.

The transition from service (cont.)

5. 34.7% of leavers felt unprepared or very unprepared so early and proactive preparation is vital to securing a smooth, phased transition into a civilian role. Supported learning opportunities and placements were well received.
6. Effective preparation whilst in service requires initiative and a willingness and proactiveness to take ownership of transitions and engage with key organisations.
7. Resettlement goes beyond employment. Without a cohesive and comprehensive resettlement package, a transition from military to civilian life could be unsuccessful. Support should be available to all service leavers, regardless of their current situation and not just those in crisis.
8. Preventative support, such as information and guidance sessions would support a service leaver better to structure their life outside of the military. Housing support must be a part of any comprehensive resettlement package this avoids vulnerability to homelessness and can offer advice to deal with bills etc.
9. Adjusting to civilian employment routines can be challenging. More support here should be provided e.g. clear workplace expectations for both them and their colleagues on workplace norms etc.

The transition from service

Support services

“There is something about a continued working relationship even after a service leaver has joined the company. It’s not the tick in the box. The rest of the work is when they are in employment and how both the service leaver can be supported, and the employer can also be supported and it’s a learning curve.”

A comprehensive resettlement service

“It should be a whole programme that everyone leaving must do.... It should cover practical things like mortgages, taxes, food costs, and relationships too. Families also need support, because when you leave, you rely on them more than ever. It needs to be a holistic package that reflects all the changes you face.”



Moving into employment

Moving into employment

1. Logistics, manufacturing and construction are common transition routes in South Yorkshire given the strong parallels between managing supply chains in the forces and the private sector.
2. Education and training were identified as areas where service leavers could make a significant impact. Colleges in South Yorkshire face tutor shortages and military experience provides strong capabilities in leadership, teamwork, and communication. They would be able to mentor and relate to students of different ages.
3. The consensus is that service leavers' skills and ambitions are not always well matched with employer opportunities, largely due to limited visibility and weak promotion. While there is a significant pool of skilled individuals leaving the forces every year, many are unaware of the full range of industries they could enter.
4. Employers struggle to effectively engage and attract service leavers due to inconsistent career fairs and resettlement events, highlighting the need for better outreach and national coverage.

Moving into employment (cont.)

5. Opportunities for leavers are often unclear, and pathways to them are often reactive, with structures led by contractors or resettlement officers lacking industry knowledge.
6. Employers, on the other hand, are rarely given the chance to directly shape the training and preparation of leavers in line with workforce needs. This disconnect contributes to the sense that ambitions are not being fully met, even when opportunities exist.
7. The cultural shift from military to civilian life deeply influences how ambitions are promoted and met. Service leavers move from an environment of clear structure and direction to one where personal initiative and self-promotion are vital. This transition can be disorientating, and without mentoring or guidance from those who have already made the leap, individuals may feel directionless or undersell their skills.
8. Embedding mentoring or “buddy systems” into transition processes helps service leavers navigate this cultural shift, articulate ambitions, and connect to roles that fit their capabilities.

Moving into employment (cont.)

9. While many employers treat service leavers equally, some recognise that adjustments, from practical preparation to alternative interview formats, can make a decisive difference. This is value in giving leavers visibility of organisations and recruitment support before they apply. Open days and insight events were seen as essential for helping individuals understand workplace culture and expectations.
10. Many CVs are written in language unfamiliar to recruiters or are “stripped down” to sound more civilian, which risks hiding the unique value of service experience. Clearer mechanisms to “decode” military roles into directly comparable civilian terms, alongside greater education about the substance behind military job titles are needed.
11. There is a mismatch between military training and civilian industry requirements. Service leavers may hold decades of expertise, but if their qualifications are not formally recognised, they often need to repeat training at personal cost and enter civilian work at a lower level than their capabilities warrant.
12. Many service leavers thrive in environments with structure, progression, and recognition, reflecting the systems they are used to in the military. Civilian organisations that embed transparent pay scales, CPD opportunities, and performance-linked rewards can better retain service leavers and sustain their motivation.

Moving into employment

Recruitment processes

“We run monthly online events... off the back of that we offer CV reviews, mock interviews and one-to-one sessions. Then we flow into work experience so people can see the environment and build confidence. From there, sites are encouraged to consider them for permanent roles. We’ve had much more success doing it that way than with the standard recruitment process.”

Role and skill alignment

“You rarely get a project manager job title within the forces, but the work that a lot of people are doing is project management. You’re planning an operation, you’re executing it, you’re delivering it and that whole process is very similar to project management. But you never see that on their CV.”



Training and retaining service leavers

Training and retaining service leavers

1. There was recognition that military qualifications are often relevant to civilian jobs, particularly those linked to trades and leadership.
2. Ex military personnel often come with much sought after soft skills and a drive for self improvement experienced themselves (as service leavers) or through their staff.
3. Providing transition time for leavers to gain qualifications and transfer their skills into new jobs is important.
4. Further work is required to develop employer's understanding of armed forces skills and qualifications with employer's understanding seen as mixed. Some felt that it was the role of the armed forces to prepare service leavers in terms of 'work readiness'. Others felt this should be done by DWP or other intermediary organisations.
5. Three areas of qualification support include (a) the translation of skills and experience gained, (b) recognition there could be misalignment between qualifications and experience, and (c) an awareness of needing to adapt and support a variety of training routes offering flexibility in meeting service users' needs in different contexts and with different preferences for learning environments.

Training and retaining service leavers (cont.)

6. The role of pastoral support for the cultural shift to civilian life was recognised.
7. Further support is required on life skills and cultural transitions to help their employment prospects and retention. Peer support networks allowing share of experiences.
8. Consultees saw value in their extensive reach and the wide range of support offered by military employment support charities and where it worked CTP was acknowledged to help to bridge the gap between military and civilian life.
9. Many employers lack awareness of where to go to get information on employing leavers. The large number and variety of military charities can be confusing and difficult to navigate for both service leavers and employers and varies between local authorities.
10. More needs to be done to facilitate mutual understanding between employers and leavers including open day events with networking opportunities and courses. They improve understanding of leavers support needs and help develop a skills pipeline.

Training and retaining service leavers

Easing the cultural shift

“Having a mentor within a within a business and organisation, something that's been there and done it and can guide them. ... They're going into a new place. They're consciously incompetent because it's new process, new systems, new personalities, new ways of working. So maybe somebody that goes through all of that. It's managing expectations.”

Support resources for employers

“There are charities out there what will engage with employers to promote the servicemen and women. They would willingly help and engage just to give that lived experience and hopefully give that employer the knowledge and reassurance that by employing service personnel it's a good option.”

Future outlook

Future Outlook

1. Support recommendations for service leavers related to inclusivity, outreach, and peer support. Events should cater to different service leavers needs.
2. Employers advocated for service leaver employability and support initiatives, especially those addressing knowledge and confidence gaps including practical and interactive workshops sharing lived experiences.
3. There was a strong willingness to partner with education and skills providers to (a) improve policy and practice for service leavers (b) showcase the value of employing service leavers and (c) highlight accessible career pathways and transferable skillsets.
4. There is a distinct lack of awareness of resources on service leaver employability and employers would like involvement in sector-led sector-specific partnerships.
5. A good workplace culture will impact on service leaver retention, and this can be enhanced by an understanding of military culture and the risks and challenges faced.

Future Outlook

6. Service leavers value having peer network systems in place during employment to help with the transition to civilian life. There is also significant value placed on clear career pathways and incentives for progression and development by means of motivation.
7. South Yorkshire partners should: raise awareness and visibility of service leaver skills, promote opportunities and signpost employers to service leaver employability initiatives, connect service leavers to employers through organised events and provide more tailored support for service leavers to transition to civilian life.
8. There is an urgent need to continue to change perceptions of the potential of service leavers who can bring valuable skills to organisations.
9. Employers suggest listening better to the service leavers about their resettlement challenges and including them in employability events and workshops as guest speakers. Tailoring support to cater to diverse needs and understanding of challenges is crucial for achieving succession service leaver employment transitions and employment in South Yorkshire.

Future Outlook

Good practice

“The best practice is having a clear support network, mentors or buddies who understand the challenges, and awareness of things like unexpected triggers..”

Where to start?

“Employers need to understand what veterans can bring, and veterans need support to make that transition. Bringing employers and veterans together — for example, through seminars or events — would help showcase the skills veterans offer and open up opportunities.”

Next Steps/Questions

Next Steps/Questions

1. Continue to disseminate sector insights and share slide decks
2. What messages stood out for you?
3. Where are the opportunities to galvanise providers and decision makers to respond to employer insights?

