



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

September 2025



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Management summary - headlines

One of the features of the South Yorkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is the development of a portfolio of knowledge and skills insights offering up to date intelligence on employer needs.

This is a summary of findings from the final employer research insights study undertaken as part of this work, focusing on veterans and service leavers within businesses in South Yorkshire. Overall, the transition to civilian life is a critical phase for veterans and service leavers, requiring careful planning and support to ensure a smooth and successful return to the civilian world.

South Yorkshire's service leavers - Employability benefits and barriers

- 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.
- 85% of UK firms employing veterans agreed they can play a key role filling skills gaps. 86% say they have skills suited to high performance management and leadership positions.
- 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.
- Many have relevant, transferrable technical and trade qualifications acquired in service.
- Alongside the skills and attributes employers cited altruistic motivations for their recruitment, though some found it hard to translate military skills to civilian roles.
- This skills translation is not always well understood or recognised, both by service leavers and prospective employers. Over two thirds of leavers experienced difficulties in seeing how their skills could relate to a new career.
- There is often a mismatch between the skills recognised by employers and the roles and pay offered. This can be compounded by poor qualification alignment, necessitating some transition support. There are tools and resources to assist with this process.
- The challenges by leavers are multi-faceted. These range from cultural and identity adjustments, practical and financial challenges and 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.
- An employer challenge is overcoming sub-conscious biases or unfounded concerns, for instance around the ability to integrate or behavioural or mental health prejudices.

The transition from service

- Awareness of the Government's Career Transition Partnership (CTP) varied and for those who knew of 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 often is seen as quite generic and not tailored to individual aspirations with a lack of diverse pathways into work and careers.
- 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.
- Mental health community support is vital but at present underprovided. The ability of peer support groups to 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.

- Just under half of interviewees discussed the importance of broader employment support that goes beyond training and qualifications, including schools, flexible work practices etc.
- 34.7% of leavers felt unprepared or very unprepared for the transition from service, 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.
- Effective preparation whilst in service requires initiative and a willingness and proactiveness to take ownership of transitions and engage with key organisations.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Moving into employment

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Opportunities for leavers are often unclear, and pathways to them are often reactive, with structures led by contractors or resettlement officers lacking industry knowledge.
- 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.
- 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 inclined to undersell their skills. 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.

- While many employers treat service leavers equally, some recognise that adjustments, from practical preparation to alternative interview formats, can make a decisive difference. There 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.
- 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.
- 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 will enter civilian work at a lower level than their capabilities warrant.
- 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.

Training and retaining service leavers

- There was recognition that military qualifications are often relevant to civilian jobs, particularly those linked to trades and leadership.
- 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.
- Providing transition time for leavers to gain qualifications and transfer their skills into new jobs is important.
- Further work is required to develop employer’s understanding of armed forces skills and qualifications which is currently 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.
- 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.
- The role of pastoral support for the cultural shift to civilian life was recognised.
- Further support is required on life skills and cultural transitions to help their employment prospects and retention. Peer support networks allow the sharing of experiences.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Future outlook

- Support recommendations for service leavers related to inclusivity, outreach, and peer support. Events should cater to different service leavers needs.
- Employers advocated for service leaver employability and support initiatives, especially those addressing knowledge and confidence gaps including practical and interactive workshops sharing lived experiences.
- 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.
- There is a distinct lack of awareness of resources on service leaver employability.
- Employers would like involvement in sector-led sector-specific partnerships.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- There is an urgent need to continue to change perceptions of the potential of service leavers, who can bring valuable skills to organisations.
- Employers suggest listening better to 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 successful service leaver employment transitions and employment in South Yorkshire.

This report recognises the significant contribution veterans make to the South Yorkshire economy through their participation in the workforce. By improving the support from military to civilian employment their unique skills and attributes can continue to be better recognised and utilised.

Preface

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIP) place employers at the heart of local skills systems to help support and drive change. This change requires direct and dynamic insights and intelligence. This report on the Veterans and Service Leavers is part of a [portfolio](#) of knowledge and skills activities designed to articulate and elevate employer voice. These include Knowledge and Skills Casts (Podcasts), Knowledge and Skills Zones and Knowledge and Skills Teach ins.

South Yorkshire LSIP background

Doncaster Chamber is the Employer Representative Body (ERB) for the South Yorkshire LSIP. They are collaborating with the two other Chambers of Commerce in South Yorkshire (Sheffield, and Barnsley and Rotherham), as well as the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, South Yorkshire College Group, universities, independent training providers and employers. The current LSIP was created in 2023 and built on the 2021 South Yorkshire Trailblazer. LSIP is a strategic document that concludes with 36 recommendations focused on improving understanding of employer needs and better aligning and informing the provider offer. These reflect the fact that employers, training and education providers have unique perspectives but similar and complementary aims. This ensures post-16 education meets local employer priorities and demand. The Government's English Devolution White Paper confirms that mayors will be given "joint ownership" of LSIPs alongside ERBs¹. The cycle LSIPs runs from October 2025 for publication in summer 2026.

Veterans and Service Leavers

Unlike previous LSIP reports that focused solely on specific sectors, this report (following on from that covering AI) reviews the Veteran and Service leaver community in South Yorkshire. According to Government estimates 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. 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.

This report seeks to review the employability landscape for service leavers in South Yorkshire, dissecting the journey into employment, the support systems on offer and the training infrastructure in place once a role has been secured.

Report purpose and approach

This report is the seventh and final in a series of research reports to understand local employer skills priorities. This will ensure the LSIP portfolio of activity continues to be

¹ See FE week [here](#)

evidence-based and actionable, and ensuring that education and training are responsive to employer and local labour market needs. It will help inform and influence curriculum development and employer engagement. The previous sector reports cover Manufacturing; Construction; Lifestyle, Leisure and Culture; Aviation; Financial and Professional Services and AI can be found [here](#).

This work has been a collective effort between the South Yorkshire Chambers, business support organisations, employers and providers. The employer questionnaire was co-designed. Twenty-nine consultees listed in Annex 1 kindly contributed to this report during May to August 2025. They don't represent the whole business community and can only offer a snapshot of the experience of Veterans and Service Leavers in South Yorkshire. The findings should be read with this caveat in mind.

Report Contents

There are four key parts to this report. Chapter 1 (South Yorkshire's service leavers-Employability benefits and barriers) looks at service leaver's skills sets and benefits to their employers, the ability to translate these skills to civilian life and the challenges associated with their transition out of service. Chapter 2 reflects on the transition from the forces, the effectiveness and availability of support services and what more could be done in this space. Chapter 3 discusses the move into employment following an exit from the armed forces including recruitment, skill and role alignment and the challenge of underemployment. Chapter 4 reflects on training and retaining service leavers including qualifications, workplace cultures and the role of providers. The final chapter takes a forward look at future partnerships with education and skills providers, best practice and next steps.

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to thank the employers who kindly gave their time to talk about their experiences, the providers and employers who steered the research lines of enquiry and the chambers and business support specialists who provided contacts.

South Yorkshires Service Leavers- Employability benefits and barriers

This chapter reviews the veteran and service leaver community in South Yorkshire; the skill sets and benefits associated with their employment and the degree to which these skills are transferrable from military to civilian life. It concludes by assessing the key barriers and challenges to transitioning out of the forces and how this affects their journey into employment.

Service leaver engagement and experiences

There were an estimated 2.5 million veterans residing in the UK in 2016, a figure that is projected to decrease year on year to 1.6 million by 2028². According to Government estimates in 2021 there were 42,500³ people in South Yorkshire who had previously served in the UK regular armed forces, reserve armed forces or both.

To understand the employability landscape for service leavers we spoke to a wide range of consultees. Around half of interviewees were veterans, with time in service ranging from, but not exclusive to, the Navy, Marines, Royal Engineers and Army Reservists. Many of these service leavers had subsequently taken positions in civic/charity leadership or had become involved in supporting veterans through organisations such as the British Legion or Forces Employment Charity. This lived experience provides authenticity, depth, and nuance that second-hand accounts often lack. We also spoke to those with limited experience engaging with service leavers, these individuals provided a useful counterfactual perspective and explored willingness to engage and understanding.

“Veterans and their skill sets is one of my longer my long-term goals. Many companies have a transitional package where they attend career fairs with a set scheme that they offer to service leavers supporting them with career progression. That’s something that we want to do to give back to service leavers.”

Service leaver skill sets and employability benefits

2025 research undertaken for the Office for Veterans’ Affairs (OVA) emphasised the range of critical skills possessed by veterans and the importance of utilising these skills to bolster the national workforce⁴. The research 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. 86% agreed that veterans have the requisite skills for high performance management positions.

These sentiments are echoed by consultees. They were asked about their key motivations for employing service leavers and the benefits and skills they bring. Soft skills were commonly cited. They are seen as reliable, punctual with a strong work ethic. These skills are regarded as invaluable and easily transferable to all civilian roles across a range of different sectors and employment positions. Veterans were also seen as having a positive impact on the wider workforce raising standards and providing role models for other team members.

² Ministry of Defence, [Population Projections: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain, 2016 to 2028](#), 2019

³ Office for Veterans’ Affairs, [What does the veteran population look like across the local authorities in England & Wales](#), 2021

⁴ Onrec, [New study reveals UK Armed Forces veterans possess critical skills for bolstering the workforce, potentially saving businesses thousands](#), 2025

“If a service leaver says to say to me, ‘I’ll get that done’, I know they are going to get that done.”

Many service leavers possess skills that are well suited to management and leadership positions. Strong communication, problem solving skills, teamwork and a proactive approach were cited as particularly important.

“I think the first one is pragmatic problem solving. The amount 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.”

Military personnel also possess relevant and transferrable technical and trade qualifications acquired whilst in service. These include certifications for engineering, logistics, HGV, plant machinery and military trade training. The alignment between military and civilian qualifications is [discussed later](#) within this report.

“There’s transferable skills, they may be in logistics, a lot of them are qualified to drive plant machinery, they’ve got HGV licences, there’s all of those sort of skill sets [and qualifications] that they come with.”

Alongside the skill sets and attributes of service leavers, employers cited broader more altruistic motivations for engagement. These included a sense of moral duty to give back through the creation of supportive networks and employment opportunities. Some employers are veterans themselves who feel a sense of duty and responsibility to continue their support for military leavers.

“I think the main motivation is it’s the right thing to do. The fact that they’ve been in the support of our country and now they need a helping hand, as a responsible business, it’s something that we’re going to absolutely thrive with. But also from a selfish perspective as well they’ve got great key qualities that can enhance and enrich our company. It’s these skilled individuals who are highly trained to work under immense pressure who fit hand in hand with our industry.”

Whilst consultees had no difficulty in highlighting the range of benefits associated with the employment of veterans and service leavers, it was noted that many employers still hold an unconscious bias, and difficulties remain in the translation of skills to civilian roles. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

Military to civilian skill translation

As noted veterans and service leavers bring a wealth of expertise and skills, particularly softer skills including leadership, reliability, organisation and punctuality. These cross-sector attributes are highly valued by employers, not just in South Yorkshire but further afield. It is therefore crucial to ensure the smooth transition of these skills from a military context into the civilian workforce.

This skills translation is not always well understood or recognised, both by service leavers and by prospective employers. A separate research study, conducted in 2019, polled 250 UK veterans on their transitioning experiences⁵. It found that over two thirds experienced difficulties in seeing how their skills could relate to a new career. In a cited example military

⁵ <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/new-research-reveals-armed-forces-veterans-take-an-average-of-seven-months-to-transition-to-civilian-careers/>

CVs are often populated with military jargon and it is not always clear how these translate directly into civilian roles. This issue can be compounded by the use of AI to produce CVs which can lead to a confused output that hinders job prospects.

“You rarely get a project manager job title within the forces, the work that a lot of people are doing within the forces is project management, but you never see that on their CV. It's always, I was a Commander and I led this operation. Just by leading an operation, that's project management. You're planning an operation, you're executing it, you're delivering it. That whole process is very similar to [the civilian view of] project management. It's understanding the skills that are developed within the forces and how they are transferable into the UK commercial market.”

“Some employers get confused because they're looking at an army CV. The use of AI means that it doesn't read like a service leaver, it reads like a civilian. Generally employers are quite busy, so if it [reads poorly and] doesn't match their requirements and they've got another ten that match, they just go with the ten that match.”

These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of alignment between military and civilian qualifications with more needing to be done to support transition.

“The qualifications identified within the construction industry [don't align]. So a veteran could be at a really high rank within the services and then they're coming across [to the civilian equivalent role] but the natural match is not there because they've haven't got site managerial qualifications.”

There is also an onus on employers. Whilst there is a widespread appreciation of service leaver's skills there is often a mismatch with the roles and pay offered. Consultees (including employers themselves) noted that employers lack an understanding of armed force's roles, experience and associated skill sets and how they best relate to civilian positions.

“I think there's also a need for employers to understand again what the difference is, it's almost like a role reversal. So whereas veterans are trying to understand what our roles are, we need to understand what the different roles are in the armed forces because obviously you've got quite a range of different roles. So you've got someone who might be an AIT programmer or software programmer for cybersecurity in the armed forces, which would fit perfectly with our cybersecurity team, but we don't know that we just assume that they're armed forces personnel.”

There is some good practice in South Yorkshire in this area including dedicated tools and resources designed by employers.

“[For us] we've got a dedicated website that we've now invested in and built specifically for the armed forces, which will allow armed forces leavers to go on and read case studies to see experience from people that were engineers, sales, etc. how they transitioned and how they've used their skills [in a civilian context].”

The effective matching of leavers and veterans with roles is covered more later in [the report](#).

Barriers and challenges to career planning and service transition

Several studies have been conducted investigating the barriers and challenges faced by armed forces personnel when transitioning into civilian roles. These include the Royal British Legion's survey of the ex-service community (2014) and the ONS's 2022 Veterans Survey.

From our consultations it is evident that the challenges facing South Yorkshire's service leavers and veterans 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. Transitional challenges and barriers are not limited to the service leavers themselves but extend to their wider family. The previous studies highlighted concerns around service leavers not seeking earlier support. The ONS survey found that veterans were more likely to seek help two years after leaving than within the first two years (66% compared to 39%). The subsequent sections of this report reflect on what can be done to support recruitment and employment practice and ultimately improved resettlement.

The transition

One of the most common challenges cited was the cultural and practical adjustment to civilian life given the absence of consistent support structures or mechanisms. Consultees noted the difficulties associated with transitioning out of the forces with the loss of the military infrastructure and its extensive systems and resources. This includes the provision of housing and health services, and support with financial management. The loss of these leaves service leavers in unfamiliar situations in areas such as financial management. This emphasises the need for wraparound 'life skills' courses to support transition.

"In military life everything's structured, everything's planned, everything's organised. Coming out of that and entering civilian life is very different."

"[When moving out of the military into a similar role in civilian life] it took me a while to understand that you have to go to certain people at certain levels for different values. You need to purchase orders, you needed accounts opening with suppliers."

"In the military if something breaks you pick up the phone and say this is broken, I need X and if it isn't on board the ship then they will fly out either to the nearest dockside, where the helicopter can go and pick it up or the port where you're going to next."

The mental health and wellbeing of both veterans and service leavers and their families was also noted. Consultees referenced isolation, loneliness and trust issues as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), trauma and the need for broader mental health support. These also provide significant challenges for service leaver's families who are also coping with relocation pressures. One veteran referenced the importance of mentoring and broader support systems to support:

"It can be helpful not only for the individual, but to let the individual know what their partner is going through, what their kids are going through and how to deal with that side of things, as well as actually trying to get a job. Their partners have followed them all their career, and that they've entrusted themselves into them and they've waited and it's hard work for them as well."

Career Planning

As previously mentioned, service leavers experience difficulties articulating their extensive skills sets and experience in civilian terms when navigating recruitment processes whilst employers struggle to understand the direct application of military qualifications.

"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 actually 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.”

“It’s being able to translate military jobs into a way that it’s understood by a civilian employer is where service leavers really struggle.”

Another challenge is overcoming some sub-conscious biases around the recruitment of service leavers. Some employers anticipate risks with the recruitment of service leavers such as the ability to integrate with teams and behavioural or mental health prejudices.

We also spoke with employers of veterans or service leavers. These included recruitment agencies, transport operators and law firms and representatives from organisations delivering training and/or specialist veteran employability/training schemes.

Later in the report we discuss the alignment between the skill sets of service leavers and specific sectors. Most of these employer consultees came from organisations that have been recognised for their support for veteran transition and employability through the Armed Forces Covenant or through associated employer recognition schemes.

“We partner with Build Force actively supporting them. It’s a nationwide programme that connects military leavers and veterans to opportunities in the built environment. Through this we provide access to mentoring and career guidance.”

We also spoke to community and organisations that provide veteran support and advocacy. These organisations work closely councils (veteran co-ordinators), charities including the British Legion and The Association of Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC)⁶ and representative organisations (Regional Employer Engagement Director at the MoD).

Whilst the most consultees had some prior armed forces experience we also spoke to those that had not worked with former armed forces personnel but planned to in future. This provided a useful counterfactual perspective and explored willingness to engage and understanding.

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These sentiments are echoed by consultees. They were asked about their key motivations for employing service leavers and the benefits and skills they bring. Soft skills were

⁶ A leading UK network that represent and supporting small, independent organisations that deliver essential services to veterans and their families.

⁷ Onrec, [New study reveals UK Armed Forces veterans possess critical skills for bolstering the workforce, potentially saving businesses thousands](#), 2025

commonly cited. They are seen as reliable, punctual with a strong work ethic. These skills are regarded as invaluable and easily transferable to all civilian roles across a range of different sectors and employment positions. Veterans were also seen as having a positive impact on the wider workforce raising standards and providing role models for other team members.

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Many service leavers possess skills that are well suited to management and leadership positions. Strong communication, problem solving skills, teamwork and a proactive approach were cited as particularly important.

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Alongside the skill sets and attributes of service leavers, employers cited broader more altruistic motivations for engagement. These included a sense of moral duty to give back through the creation of supportive networks and employment opportunities. Some employers are veterans themselves who feel a sense of duty and responsibility to continue their support for military leavers.

“I think the main motivation is it’s the right thing to do. The fact that they’ve been in the support of our country and now they need a helping hand, as a responsible business, it’s something that we’re going to absolutely thrive with. But also from a selfish perspective as well they’ve got great key qualities that can enhance and enrich our company. It’s these skilled individuals who are highly trained to work under immense pressure who fit hand in hand with our industry.”

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Military to civilian skill translation

Veterans and service leavers bring a wealth of expertise and skills, particularly softer skills including leadership, reliability, organisation and punctuality. These cross-sector attributes are highly valued by employers, not just in South Yorkshire but further afield. It is therefore crucial to ensure the smooth transition of these skills from a military context into the civilian workforce.

This skills translation is not always well understood or recognised, both by service leavers and by prospective employers. A separate research study, conducted in 2019, polled 250 UK veterans on their transitioning experiences⁸. It found that over two thirds experienced difficulties in seeing how their skills could relate to a new career. In a cited example military CVs are often populated with military jargon and it is not always clear how these translate directly into civilian roles. This issue can be compounded by the use of AI to produce CVs which can lead to a confused output that hinders job prospects.

“You rarely get a project manager job title within the forces, the work that a lot of people are doing within the forces is project management, but you never see that on their CV. It's always, I was a Commander and I led this operation. Just by leading operation, that's project management. You're planning an operation, you're executing it, you're delivering it. That whole process is very similar to the project management. It's understanding the skills that are developed within the forces and how they are transferable into the UK commercial market.”

“Some employers get confused because they're looking at an army CV. The use of AI means that it doesn't read like a service leaver it reads a civilian. Generally employers are quite busy, so if it [reads poorly and] doesn't match their requirements and they've got another ten that match, they just go with the ten that match.”

These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of alignment between military and civilian qualifications with more needing to be done to support transition.

“The qualifications identified within the construction industry [don't align]. So a veteran could be at a really high rank within the services and then they're coming across [to the civilian equivalent role] but the natural match is not there because they've haven't got site managerial qualifications.”

There is also an onus on employers. Whilst there is a widespread appreciation of service leaver's skills there is often a mismatch with the roles and pay offered. Consultees (including employers themselves) noted that employers lack an understanding of armed force's roles, experience and associated skill sets and how they best relate to civilian positions.

“I think there's also a need for employers to understand again what the difference is, it's almost like a role reversal. So whereas veterans are trying to understand what our roles are, we need to understand what the different roles are in the armed forces are because obviously you've got quite a range of different roles. So you've got someone who might be a, you know, AIT programmer software programmer for cybersecurity in the armed forces, which would fit perfectly with our cybersecurity team but we don't know that we just assume that they're an armed forces personnel.”

There is some good practice in South Yorkshire in this area including dedicated tools and resources designed by employers.

“[For us] we've got a dedicated website that we've now invested in and built specifically for the armed forces, which will allow armed forces leavers to go on and read case studies to see experience from people that were engineers, sales, etc. how they transitioned and how they've used their skills [in a civilian context].”

The effective matching of leavers and veterans with roles is covered more later in [the report](#).

⁸ <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/new-research-reveals-armed-forces-veterans-take-an-average-of-seven-months-to-transition-to-civilian-careers/>

Barriers and challenges to career planning and service transition

Several studies have been conducted investigating the barriers and challenges faced by armed forces personnel when transition into civilian roles. These include the Royal British Legion's survey of the ex-service community (2014) and the ONS's 2022 Veterans Survey.

From our consultations it is evident that the challenges facing South Yorkshire's service leavers and veterans 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. Transitional challenges and barriers are not limited to the service leavers themselves but extend to their wider family. The previous studies highlighted concerns around service leavers not seeking earlier support. The ONS survey found that veterans were more likely to seek help two years after leaving than within the first two years (66% compared to 39%). The subsequent sections of this report reflect on what can be done to support recruitment and employment practice and ultimately improved resettlement.

The transition

One of the most common challenges cited was the cultural and practical adjustment to civilian life given the absence of consistent support structures or mechanisms. Consultees noted the difficulties associated with transitioning out of the forces with the loss of the military infrastructure and its extensive systems and resources. This includes the provision of housing and health services, and support with financial management. The loss of these leaves service leavers in unfamiliar situations in areas such as financial management. This emphasises the need for wraparound 'life skills' courses to support transition.

"In military life everything's structured, everything's planned, everything's organised. Coming out of that and entering civilian life is very different."

"[When moving out of the military into a similar role in civilian life] it took me a while to understand that you have to go to certain people at certain levels for different values. You need purchase orders; you need accounts opening with suppliers."

"In the military if something breaks you pick up the phone and say this is broken, I need X and if it isn't on board the ship then they will fly it out either to the nearest dockside, where the helicopter can go and pick it up, or the port where you're going to next."

The mental health and wellbeing of both veterans and service leavers and their families was also noted. Consultees referenced isolation, loneliness and trust issues as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), trauma and the need for broader mental health support. These also provide significant challenges for service leaver's families who are also coping with relocation pressures. One veteran referenced the importance of mentoring and broader support systems:

"It can be helpful not only for the individual, but to let the individual know what their partner is going through, what their kids are going through and how to deal with that side of things, as well as actually trying to get a job. Their partners have followed them all their career, and that they've entrusted themselves into them and they've waited and it's hard work for them as well."

Career Planning

As previously mentioned, service leavers experience difficulties articulating their extensive skills sets and experience in civilian terms when navigating recruitment processes, whilst employers struggle to understand the direct application of military qualifications.

“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 actually 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.”

“Being able to translate military jobs in a way that it's understood by a civilian employer is where service leavers really struggle.”

Another challenge is overcoming some sub-conscious biases around the recruitment of service leavers. Some employers anticipate risks with the recruitment of service leavers such as the ability to integrate with teams and behavioural or mental health prejudices.

The transition from service

This chapter examines the use and suitability of the Career Transition Partnership for both veterans and employers. It discusses the wider support systems in South Yorkshire including signposting and mental wellbeing assistance. In-service preparation is discussed including training opportunities and the role of employers. The chapter concludes by highlighting what a comprehensive resettlement package should look like and how this can be further developed in South Yorkshire.

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP)

Awareness of the CTP varied. Seven companies, some of which were led by service leavers, had not heard of the CTP or were not engaged in anyway. However, three of these were open to exploring and had looked into information relating to the CTP after being made aware of its existence. Of those who had begun to build familiarity with the service, many felt that the provision was useful, with its focus on employability and the applicability of skills gained being of use to those leaving service.

“I would be very interested to speak to the Career Transition Partnership. We would absolutely be open to that.”

However, for those with a deeper knowledge of the CTP, attitudes were mixed, with veterans typically finding the service less helpful than employers. For employers, the CTP hosts useful events such as the 2025 Employment Fair and Military Insight Days for veterans with an interest in a specific industry. These Insight Days bring together large employers such as Bank of America, Great Western Rail and Marks and Spencer's to showcase available roles. Smaller employers can attend sector specific events such as Build Force, which supports service leavers to enter into the construction industry. However, only one employer discussed making “good use” of the events, indicating that an awareness of CTP has not translated to engagement and participation with the CTP.

“The career fairs are brilliant, and we use the events every single month. We are big fans of CTP, and we work well with them.”

For those leaving service, perceptions of the CTP are somewhat more negative. The CTP offer is seen as quite generic and not easily tailored to meet individual aspirations. As such, unless a service leaver was interested in one of the more “mainstream” roles on offer (typically in security or engineering), it was felt that the CTP could not easily offer practical support into employment. Service leavers also discussed frustration with the focus on CV guidance and writing, finding the advice given to be unhelpful and, in some cases, ‘irrelevant’. However, the accessibility of the CTP as a result of it being a free service was appreciated as its accessibility to people with a range of economic circumstances can encourage people to engage with the service.

“They're all right if you want a bog-standard course ... but a lot of people want something more specialised and individualistic...they didn't really understand what businesses wanted as well, because it was just like a sausage machine for them.”

The lack of pathways into work and careers via the CTP was highlighted as a limiting factor for service leavers. Security, bricklaying or maintenance were often suggested as viable career options for service leavers, with some feeling that these roles were continuously referenced even when they were not interested. One service leaver highlighted a lack of support for those looking to work in the charity sector. Another highlighted gaps between advice given and current business needs and vacancies, with a lack of industry experience and relevant training being cited as a key barrier to the success of the CTP.

“I have a very low opinion of the CTP, incredibly low because when I went to see them, I said to them ‘I want to work in a sector where I’m able to give back’... They had nothing for me and were completely stumped as to how one would go about getting into [third sector] roles. What they did offer me was some nice training packages to be a gas fitter or a bricklayer.”

Effectiveness of South Yorkshires wider support services

Ten organisations discussed the need for more signposting between services in order to ensure the continuation of support where necessary. This could include greater collaboration between charities, training providers, employment support providers and employers. Whilst it was acknowledged by employers and service leavers that a lot of support does exist, it is not always joined up, meaning some service leavers fall through the cracks or circle back to the CTP or the DWP. Whilst word of mouth and peer support networks are an incredibly effective method of signposting service leavers to appropriate support, responsibility to do this should not only be held by other service leavers. Both councils and training providers also have a responsibility to market their services appropriately to ensure that service leavers can and do access them.

“There could be a lot more data out there [such as] recommendations from officers [which] can go onto a board. Anything that can help. Also signposting.”

Mental health community support is vital but at present underprovided. The ability to access peer support groups could help service leavers to adjust to civilian life, with loneliness and a loss of community highlighted as two key factors that influence well-being amongst service leavers. Peer support services would also reduce strain on local NHS services, reducing the waiting lists for mental health support and ensuring that support given is applicable to service leavers. Though national providers like Mind and the Samaritans are helpful, they do not offer a sense of local community in the same way as ex-service support networks. Mental health support, it was claimed, should not focus solely on PTSD. Whilst some soldiers do develop PTSD through their service, many do not, especially those who do not serve in active combat zones. Support for service leavers that is tailored towards managing PTSD is not applicable to many and does not alleviate some of the mental health issues associated with rejoining and adjusting to civilian life.

“Most people don’t have [PTSD], the bit that most people struggle with is actually a bit of loneliness.”

Just under half of interviewees discussed the importance of broader employment support that goes beyond training and qualifications. This support will often be beneficial for employers as well as service leavers as it would ensure that the service leaver is able to adjust to their new workplace. Once a service leaver secures a job, issues regarding salary and status transition can manifest. In addition to this, to start a new job, some service leavers travel many miles from their base, which results in them needing to find a school for their

children, a suitable home, and a new network of friends. Each of these changes can have a significant impact of mental wellbeing and on hours available to work. As such, adjustments may need to be made as a service leaver establishes a life for themselves outside of the armed forces. Employers must be prepared to offer flexible working, salary transparency and wellbeing support on a case-by-case basis for new recruits.

“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 actually when they are in employment and how both the service leaver can be supported, and the employer can also be supported- it’s a learning curve.”

Preparations whilst still in service

According to the Veterans Survey by the Office for Veterans Affairs, 43.2% of service leavers felt prepared to leave the armed forces, whilst 34.7% felt unprepared or very unprepared⁹.

Early and proactive preparation is vital to securing a smooth transition into a civilian role. Thirteen consultees stressed the importance of preparing for life after service between six and twelve months before leaving the armed forces, with some recommending beginning preparations two years before leaving. This could be better supported through a formal framework or guidelines that highlight potential monthly milestones (for example, six months before leaving, and individual should have completed X, Y and Z). This phased approach could reduce the likelihood of experiencing a culture shock upon leaving the force and increase the likelihood of securing stable work and housing.

“It would be sensible and reasonable that before your end of contract, you’re given a bit of time to start [preparing], even if it’s a little check sheet. At three months, you’re given a bit more time to sort yourself out, and in your last month, instead of waiting for you to take leave and do it all in your leave, the MOD could contribute a little bit more.”

Enhanced Learning Credits supplied by the Ministry of Defence enable those approaching the end of their service to access Level 3+ qualifications at a reduced rate of free of charge. Project management training and technical trade training was especially sought after by employers. Online and distance learning, such as courses provided through the Open University can be incredibly beneficial, especially for those working overseas. For those looking to undertake in-person training, such as a workplace placement, the armed forces may offer a up to a month of leave for people to seek work experience. Securing a placement to undertake during this period of leave could support an individual to develop confidence in an unfamiliar, civilian workplace and build valuable experience for their CV.

“I’m going to be controversial and say I think the army gives people a good leaving package. It’s a month of free leave - there’s a month where you can do work experience - and I think that’s good.”

Effective preparation whilst in service requires initiative and a willingness to take ownership of their own transition. Contacting organisations such as the DWP, CTP or Armed Forces Covenant teams a few months prior to leaving will help service leavers make a smooth transition into civilian life. Where possible, drawing on local contacts, such as local charities or other service leavers could support someone in the process of leaving the military to establish a support network. For those who do not proactively seek support, a fear of change

⁹ [Office for Veterans Affairs \(2022\) Preparedness to leave the UK armed forces](#)

is a common barrier to preparedness. Additional support to address some of these fears could reduce anxiety amongst those coming to an end of their military service career, enabling them to take proactive steps towards leaving service.

“Anecdotally I observe that there's a lot of people who sit there in their last year and just bury their head in the sand. These people obviously need some help in terms of direction, but I don't think giving them more time off is going to help...I do know there's definitely a mindset shift for some people who are really scared of the civilian world and scared of that change.”

A comprehensive resettlement package

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. Whilst crisis support is often strong, such as supporting those in need of welfare, leavers should not be excluded from support because they are not currently in crisis. One service leaver discussed an experience during which he was denied financial support due to the fact his wife was in employment – a decision felt to be unfair. Preventative support, such as structured and regular payments or information and guidance sessions would support a leaver to structure their life outside the military without worrying about routine needs like housing or utilities.

Housing support must be a part of a comprehensive resettlement package. Secure housing is a core need, with homelessness being an identified issue amongst service leavers. The ability to secure housing goes beyond an initial deposit or rent payment – being able to keep up with payments for utilities, insurance and maintenance are all important. Many leavers have little experience with finding the most affordable energy supplier or managing direct debits. Additional support could reduce stress and financial pressures. Having stable and safe housing will enable leavers to integrate more successfully into civilian life.

“It goes far beyond just employment support. It's that cultural shift and that life infrastructure, that building the day-to-day in order to have that comprehensive resettlement. It's all connected. If you've got somewhere to live, if you know that you're paying your bills, then you're more settled. You're not going to fall through the cracks.”

“It should be a whole programme that everyone leaving has to 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.”

Adjusting to civilian routines, especially those regarding employment, can be challenging, meaning that more support in this area should be provided. Moving away from the armed forces, which entails strict structures, routines and expectations, into a more flexible or less disciplined civilian world can be a significant cultural shift. This is typically evident in relation to workplace etiquette, with civilian workplaces being more flexible and less disciplined than the armed forces. Adjusting expectations to fit a new workplace environment can be challenging, meaning a comprehensive resettlement package should support employers to work with leavers to set clear workplace expectations for both them and their colleagues.

[Need support to develop] soft skills like how to behave in a workplace, how to behave in an office environment, workplace norms.”

Moving into employment

This chapter looks at how service leavers' skills align with key sectors in South Yorkshire, how their career ambitions are promoted and matched with opportunities, the recruitment practices that shape their access to roles, the translation of military skills into civilian terms, and the risks of underemployment.

Sector matching

Consultees were asked whether there are particular sectors in South Yorkshire that are especially well suited to service leavers. Roles reliant on organisation and routine such as blue light services were currently common destinations for the veteran community. The structure, teamwork, and sense of purpose associated with these roles make them comfortable transitions for many service leavers. Uniformed services also provide continuity of culture while enabling individuals to contribute their discipline and reliability to the wider community.

“A lot wander into the police force, the fire brigade, or the ambulance service because it has a similar set up to what they're used to. Much of it is about that indoctrination they've gone through, and they find it difficult to break from that, so these services provide a strong fit.”

Engineering and manufacturing were noted as common pathways for service leavers. The extensive experience with electrical and mechanical systems, plant operations, and maintenance acquired through forces training provided a clear route into related engineering roles. Their hands on technical training and problem-solving capabilities also mean they can adapt quickly to new environments and equipment. Facilities management roles were also cited as a clear route and one commonly taken, with service leavers able to transfer both qualifications and practical experience into civilian workplaces.

“Those that have got engineering skills, electrical skills, all that kind of hands-on stuff do really well in our maintenance roles. We're talking about warehouse operative roles too, and there's a clear fit into facilities management whereby the skill sets and qualifications match.”

Logistics is perhaps the most direct translation from military to civilian life, given the strong parallels between managing supply chains in the forces and in the private sector. Many service leavers have backgrounds in stores, fleet management, or large-scale organisational planning, which are readily applicable to South Yorkshire's warehousing and distribution industries. The region's transport and logistics hubs benefit directly from these transferable skills.

“Most of the connections I've seen have been logistically based. They come from a background of running stores, engineering works or wider organisational roles. Those skills that come from working within the Army are clearly transferable: trucks, plant machinery, and logistics as a whole provide a good environment for them to move into.”

Construction also emerged as a well-suited sector, both for those with direct engineering or project management backgrounds and for service leavers looking for practical, physical work. Site management, health and safety, and trade roles are common destinations, with the

sector providing both demand and a familiar structured environment. Many service leavers are drawn to construction because of its outdoor and active nature, which reflects elements of military life.

“Construction has always attracted service leavers because it’s outdoors and very physical. Many move into trade roles and site management.”

Beyond traditional industries, education and training were identified as areas where service leavers could make a significant impact. Colleges in South Yorkshire face shortages of tutors, and military experience provides a strong base in leadership, teamwork, and communication. Service leavers’ ability to mentor and relate to students of different ages allows them to contribute meaningfully to skills development in the region.

“There’s a huge skills shortage within the education sector, especially college tutors. People coming out of the forces have a lot of life experience and people management skills. They can grasp a group of students no matter the age and apply their teamwork and adaptability to help fill this gap.”

Promoting and matching career aspirations

Consultees were asked how well the skills and career aspirations of service leavers are promoted and matched with employer opportunities, and whether current approaches meet their ambitions. 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. Likewise, employers often do not fully appreciate how to engage with or attract this talent. Career fairs and resettlement events are inconsistent, and in some cases are absent in regions where many service leavers eventually settle. This creates missed opportunities on both sides and reinforces the need for better outreach, employer involvement, and consistent national coverage.

“No, 100% not. And that’s because people don’t know. Because it’s not pushed enough... there are 14,000 transitioning every year, and there will be a lot landing in South Yorkshire.”

“It’s how we get the voices heard and it’s how companies advertise that fact and get other companies on board. It’s things like signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant, attending events, putting those on social media and making sure that all that marketing paraphernalia is within your communication. It really does need to be shouted about.”

Where opportunities do exist, pathways into them are not always clear. Some employers offer strong support on an individual basis, but this is more reactive than systemic. The structures designed to support transition are often led by contractors or resettlement officers who may lack knowledge of specific industries, limiting their ability to connect service leavers with meaningful careers. 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.

“I don’t think it’s the employers. I think the way the training is led is by the organisations who are willing to pay the contractor to be in the club. Employers don’t know what they’re getting with a service person nine times out of ten. If employers were leading the charge on asking

for a specific type of person, saying ‘we need people trained in this,’ then the system could chase that. But it’s not in their business model to ask employers what they want....”

“Somebody in Sheffield who is keen to employ service leavers wouldn’t know how to even get involved with asking the CTP what’s on offer or how to get the right skilled people.”

Another challenge is that career support is often generic, with many service leavers funnelled towards the same set of roles such as logistics, project management, or health and safety. While these pathways work for some, they do not reflect the breadth of ambitions or specialist skills across the community. Those aiming for niche roles often have to pursue them alone, navigating systems that are not designed for individuality. This can leave service leavers feeling that their ambitions are only partially recognised.

“If you’re wanting something niche, you’ve sometimes got to fight for it. A lot of people go for the standard courses, but if you want something specific for yourself, it’s available you’ve just got to find it yourself. There isn’t enough structure to help those who want to take a different route.”

Finally, 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. Embedding mentoring or “buddy systems” into transition processes would help service leavers navigate this cultural shift, articulate ambitions, and connect to roles that fit their capabilities.

“They’ve gone from having pure direction to no direction. In the military you wake up, go to a notice board, and follow a set of standing orders. Now they’re waiting for that direction to come from somewhere.”

“Someone needs to tell them: you’ve got to find your own way now. Mentoring is a massive part of bridging that gap. In the Marines we called it the buddy-buddy system if someone’s struggling, you help them through, and that should be embedded into the process.”

Recruitment approaches

Employers and service leavers were asked what support and guidance could be offered throughout the recruitment process to ensure individuals can demonstrate their full capabilities. The responses show that while many employers treat service leavers equally, some recognise that adjustments, from practical preparation to alternative interview formats, can make a decisive difference.

A main theme was the value of giving service leavers visibility of organisations and recruitment processes before they apply. Open days and insight events were seen as essential for helping individuals understand workplace culture and expectations. As one employer put it:

“The biggest one is open days... allowing your employees time to speak to service leavers openly and honestly, showing them what’s out there the good and the bad. There’s no point hiding away from it. If you’re fair, open and honest, you get a lot more out of people, and it makes that first hour on a Monday morning easier.”

Some employers have already built structured transition programmes, combining CV support, mock interviews and work experience. These approaches were seen as far more effective than traditional 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.”

Interview preparation was another area where additional support could level the playing field. Several contributors stressed that service leavers often have little or no experience of civilian-style interviews and can therefore be disadvantaged. As one recruiter explained:

“It’s about saying to them before the interview what to expect. Not all companies use competency-based interviews, but if they do, and you’ve never done one before, you’re at a disadvantage. Some form of interview training, or even just giving notes beforehand, helps people know what’s coming.”

Employers also highlighted the importance of adapting interviews to allow individuals to showcase skills in different ways. For some, this meant guaranteed interviews and task-based exercises rather than purely verbal assessments.

“We guaranteed any service leaver applying for a job an interview as long as their skills aligned... and it wasn’t just competence-based. For those who struggled to articulate themselves verbally or in writing, we’d use exercises where they could demonstrate they could do the job.”

Others experimented with informal or practical formats that made the process less intimidating and more reflective of real capability.

“This might be the first interview someone has done in 25 or 30 years. It can be nerve-racking. We prefer to just meet for a coffee and a chat about their background. It eases the pressure and gives a better sense of the person than a panel interview ever would.”

“Any kind of practical scenario works. Put us in a situation that’s a bit challenging and we’ll shine. Not everyone can articulate themselves well in a suit in front of a panel but give them something hands-on and you’ll see their capability straight away.”

Others suggested more creative ways of giving candidates the chance to demonstrate their skills, such as presentation tasks, video submissions or micro-teaching exercises. These approaches were seen as better reflections of character, confidence and ability than standard CVs or set-piece interviews.

Finally, contributors noted the need for employers to be alert to language and culture differences. Service leavers may not use the same “buzzwords” as civilian candidates, but this does not mean they lack the skills.

“For big companies, interviews are often a tick-box exercise. Service leavers may have done exactly the right things but call it something different. Maybe there should be an alert for

interviewers to take their time and consider that they might not use exactly the right language.”

Overall service leavers can thrive in recruitment when employers provide clear preparation, adapt interviews to showcase practical skills and create opportunities to experience the workplace in advance. Standard processes often underplay their abilities, but with modest adjustments, from mock interviews to guaranteed shortlisting and from informal conversations to practical tasks, employers can unlock the real potential of service leavers during recruitment.

Role and skill alignment

Employers were asked how they might best identify where service leavers or their partners could be a good fit within their teams, and how they could better align roles with the skills and experience of service leavers. The following section summarises their responses, highlighting key themes and practical approaches.

As previously covered a significant barrier identified is that military acquired skills are not always understood or recognised by civilian employers. Service leavers often bring qualities such as discipline, punctuality, leadership, and problem-solving, but these strengths can be lost in translation when expressed in military jargon or tied to qualifications not recognised outside the forces. 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. This mismatch leads to missed opportunities, as recruiters may default to candidates whose CVs more neatly match civilian job descriptions. Employers stressed the need for clearer mechanisms to “decode” military roles into directly comparable civilian terms, alongside greater education about the substance behind military job titles.

“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.”

“Unless you’re recruiting to somebody who’s either a service leaver or has worked closely with the military, you’re going to be missed. Yours will get put in the no file before you’ve even got a chance to get into that conversation space.”

Employers also highlighted the disconnect 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. This not only undermines confidence but also represents a missed opportunity for employers to access highly skilled talent. Respondents suggested that conversion pathways and mutual recognition of qualifications are critical, alongside challenging misconceptions that service leavers are inflexible or overly reliant on orders.

“Someone who’s been a service leaver could be a real high rank within the services and then they’re coming across and the natural match is not going to be there because they’ve not got the site managerial qualifications. They may have transferable qualifications, but on site they’d have to retrain, which would be a back step for them and their pay would reflect that.”

“The qualifications that he’s gained don’t... He’s got the capabilities and the skills, but the piece of paper that he’s got is not recognised in our industries. There could be something there that allows them when they’re resettling to transition MOD qualifications direct to civic recognised qualifications through basic assessment.”

Another theme was the value of low-pressure introductions that allow both sides to explore fit. Service leavers often find formal interviews daunting and may not immediately see how their skills translate into civilian roles. Employers suggested familiarisation visits, open days, or mock interviews as effective ways to build understanding and confidence. These softer touchpoints help service leavers explore opportunities while giving employers a clearer sense of the transferable value they bring.

“You wouldn’t be as much on edge, so you would be willing to open up, ask questions, and see whether your skill set fit the business and whether the business’s skill set fit you.”

Finally, employers stressed that once service leavers are recruited, alignment does not stop at the point of entry. 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. This highlights the need for providers to support employers in designing career pathways that mirror progression models familiar to service leavers while also educating businesses on the long-term benefits of structured incentives.

“The incentivisation needed to be a sliding scale of payment based on experience. Embedding a structure and incentive within the workforce encourages service leavers to better themselves, much like the progression system they are used to in the military.”

Underemployment

Interviewees were asked how employers and support organisations can enable service leavers and their partners to secure work that matches their skills and is not below their level of experience, thereby avoiding underemployment. A central theme was the mismatch between military careers and civilian recruitment systems. Employers reported that service leavers are often filtered out at the first hurdle because their experience does not align neatly with civilian job descriptions. This leaves them underemployed despite their capability.

“The first barrier is translating who they are in a way that us civilians understand. You get CVs that are five pages long listing duties, but there’s no outcome, no measurable output of what they’ve done. So it’s really hard for a hiring manager to connect that to a civilian role, even though the skills are all there. Unless somebody helps translate that, they get filtered out before the interview stage.”

Several people interviewed emphasised that recruiters themselves need education and exposure to military pathways to reduce this risk.

“It’s probably recruitment companies that need to be educated and exposed... to maximise opportunities for service leavers to get into the world of work. Too often their experience is discounted because it doesn’t look like a straightforward match, even though they’ve got the

skills to do the job and more. If the recruiters don't understand that the service leaver never even gets a chance to prove themselves."

Employers also described the benefits of flexibility and transitional support. Adjustments to working hours, phased starts and trial placements enabled service leavers to adapt more smoothly. Placements in particular were seen as highly valuable, offering both sides the opportunity to test whether a role or sector was the right fit and to avoid individuals being channelled into roles below their skill level.

"It's not a bad experience because the job might not be right for them.... I would recommend work experience to anybody, regardless of whether they're a service leaver or not."

Some employers noted that part of their role was to recognise when a job was beneath a candidate's ability and redirect them towards something more suitable. Without this intervention, skilled applicants risk being placed into basic roles where their potential is wasted.

"On a couple of occasions we said to people we don't actually think the role's right for you because it's below your capability. We appreciated they were looking for work, but we thought they'd very quickly get frustrated, so we worked with them on the understanding that it was never going to be long term."

"We've seen people come to us and the job they've applied for is actually well below their capabilities. The way the system works, it almost channels them into the wrong jobs. If you sit down with them, you can see the leadership, the technical expertise, the resilience — all things that don't show up on a CV that's been forced into civilian language. Without that conversation, they'd just be placed into something basic, and they'd be wasted."

Several comments pointed to the need for stronger partnerships between resettlement providers, local industries, and employers. Some felt that organisations like CTP should do more to coach service leavers in adapting their CVs and language, while others argued for industry-based mentors who understand both sides of the transition. This support is critical in preventing people from drifting into "any job" simply to pay bills, which can leave them trapped in underemployment or even returning to the forces.

"At the moment you've got British forces resettlement officers sat there... trying to provide advice and guidance. Well, that to me is not always effective when there's people like myself and thousands of others that have worn the shoes, that are in the industry, that have got a lot of contacts and a lot of knowledge that they can impart."

"I think more work could be done in that. They need a little bit more coaching to understand their situation more and how that equates over here in Civvy Street. So you know, we could do better in that transition in my mind."

Training and retaining service leavers

This chapter looks at how military qualifications are recognised in civilian life and how providers can offer qualification support, ways in which this support can ease the cultural shift and as such improve retention, and where employers can look for support to better their understanding of the needs of service leavers.

Military to civilian recognised qualifications

There was recognition from the business representatives interviewed that the military qualifications are often relevant to civilian jobs. This was particularly true of qualifications linked to trades and leadership.

Consultees also highlighted the importance of the soft skills developed through the military and the drive for self-improvement they had either experienced themselves (as service leavers) or through their staff.

The importance of providing transition time for service leavers to gain qualifications and transfer their skills into new jobs such as within engineering or the health service was also noted. One service leaver highlighted how important the conversion courses they had undertaken after leaving the army were which helped them to gain a job as a paramedic. Although further work is required to ensure that all conversion courses align with attendee's career aspirations.

The insights and experiences highlight the importance of timely career advice and opportunities to undertake training which aligns with people's experiences and goals for the future.

The provider role in qualification support

As previously referenced, further work is also required to develop employer's understanding of armed forces skills and qualifications with employer's understanding seen as mixed. Some employers 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. This highlights the importance of ensuring shared responsibility across all key groups as well as the importance of a shared language and use of terminology.

Consultees highlighted three core areas of qualification support needed. The first was around the translation of skills and experience gained in the military, whether this was in providing a way for businesses to understand how military qualifications compared to civilian ones, or even advocating for military and civilian qualifications to be taught to the same standards.

"There could be something there that allows them when they're resettling with those MOD qualifications, to transition them direct to civvy recognised qualifications through basic assessment, i.e. this is the national occupational standard that's relevant to your MOD standard... Or what would be even better is if the military, whilst they were in service, aligned themselves with the standard national occupational standards... if you are going to be a fabricator welder in the military that you do your qualifications and that you assess to that standard and you get a civvy recognised qualification straight away because you're good enough, you've got the skill sets, assess you straight away there."

Secondly, there was a recognition that there could be misalignment between qualifications and experience. For example, some roles within the armed forces may have little requirement for IT skills, whereas many civilian jobs will require these even for broadly vocational career options. Or where a service leaver might have a wealth of experience but no formal qualification to underpin that.

“If they're looking to go into leadership roles, some leadership qualifications that will back up their experience. The standard qualifications are out there for each job, but it's just sometimes they might not have... Even though they've done the job, they can't get the job that they're applying for because they don't have the civilian's qualification.”

“I've got where I am based on my vocational experience in the military, not through qualifications. I don't have a degree. I thought about a security risk management degree. I'm 57 now. I'm in the back end of my career now and I'm like, what would the degree give me?”

And thirdly, there was an awareness of needing to adapt and support a variety of training routes to be flexible to meet the needs of service users in different contexts and with different preferences for learning environments.

“I think the way that we do the training now is we can do remote training, they can learn virtually, so that can accommodate better to their family's needs. So, it's not going into a college or they can do it from the comfort of the home or within the office.”

“We then have a process where if a member then recruits somebody from the armed forces industry, we'll give them additional discount to train them on the next two courses. Incentivise our members to encourage them to employ armed forces leavers but also give the armed forces leaders a path.”

The need to provide flexible learning approaches to the specific training and qualification needs of service leavers was also intertwined with the need to provide pastoral support for the cultural shift to civilian life. Some interviewees even went so far as to suggest key life skills qualifications.

“General life skills because a lot of the service leavers, their lives [have been] pretty much managed for them. From accommodation, financial planning, things like that. That could be something that training providers could particularly provide to service leavers. If you've got somebody who joined the military at 16 or 17 and is coming out of the forces and never owned their own home. It must be an absolute minefield. So maybe training providers could provide more support around things like financial planning and budgeting.”

Easing the cultural shift and improving retention

Most consultees acknowledged that further bespoke support was required on life skills and cultural transitions to support former armed forces personnel and help their employment prospects and retention rates. For example, structuring recruitment and work experience in ways that acknowledge their specific requirements.

“We offer work experience off the back of those [information] events so that people can come in, build relationships and see and try the jobs and see the environment and help it understand a bit better....”

“We then encourage the sites to consider the individual for a permanent placement. We've had much more success getting armed forces people in when they flow through that way.”

“We’ve had more success than the standard sort of process that we go through with everyone.”

Peer support networks are important ideally when they can be paired with other armed forces veterans or reservists who share their same experiences and ‘speak their language’.

“Having a mentor within a business and organisation, someone 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.”

“They might not appreciate the term mentor. It sounds like somebody’s overseeing them. If you see them in the military, we might call them a buddy. That might be a more welcoming term. Someone that will say, ‘the canteens up here’, ‘that’s over there’, this is what we do for this’.”

“Offering people mentorship, buddying, that sort of thing, shadowing so that they can see what else is out there too. There’s a lot that kind of supports retention.”

A small number of interviewees expressed that they felt that their equalities focus across a range of all characteristics was sufficient to capture all employees’ needs, regardless of background or military service. This could be reflective of a broad and inclusive way of working that has been designed to suit many needs, or it could be reflective of a gap in understanding of the unique experiences of service leavers.

Support resources for employers

Employers and service leavers were asked where employers can go to better understand how they can support skills and employment opportunities for service leavers. Consultees saw this as very important. They offered many alternative support systems, highlighting that there is no one stop shop offering best practice.

Many participants had experience engaging with support organisations. Most commonly, employers and service leavers highlighted military charities such as Help for Heroes or the Forces Employment charity. Consultees saw value in their extensive reach and the wide range of support they offer. Despite the comments earlier the Career Transition Partnership was acknowledged to help bridge that gap between military and civilian life. Their experience understanding the difficulties service leavers face serves as a valuable resource for improving employer’s understanding.

“There are charities out there who will engage with employers to actually 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.”

Whilst employers acknowledged the need for support, many expressed a lack of awareness of where to go to get information. Some consultees specifically mentioned a limited understanding of how to access external resources.

“I wouldn’t know where to direct somebody, so that’s probably not a good thing... There’s something out there that is there to support employers, but I think it needs to be a little bit more well known for employers to lean on.”

One consultee saw the wider offering as fragmented leading to confusion about which organisation was best to approach for support. The large number and variety of military

charities can be confusing and difficult to navigate for both service leavers and employers. It was also acknowledged that service leavers in different local authorities can face different challenges and need can also relate to their former position within the army (i.e. former officers face different challenges to other ranks). These challenges can lead to a lack of cohesion between the support offered and the needs of the service leavers.

"There are far too many military charities...there are no homeless veterans on the streets of Rotherham and yet somebody says I want to raise £500,000 to build housing for them. It's sucking in charitable money and it's not being optimised, so I would say go to the actual experts, they know the range of people."

Of the participants who had engaged with military support systems, it was clear that more needs to be done to facilitate the link between employers and service leavers. Open day style events with networking opportunities and courses were emphasised as valuable. They improve employer's understanding of how to support service leavers but also help to developing a potential skills pipeline.

"We went on a course by York University, and it just gave you almost veteran awareness training, what to consider, what to think about and how to be as supportive an employer as you could be. Not as a civilian but from a veteran perspective."

"Free open workshops, the employer offering that service...we're having an open day, it's a practical workshop to see where your skills are and how we can transfer your skills."

Future outlook

This final chapter looks at the extent to which employers are interested in engaging with future support provision, how employers are currently partnering with education and skills providers, shared examples of best practice regarding service leaver employment, and the single most important things that can be done to better meet the needs of service leavers.

Engaging with future support provision

Employers advocated for service leaver employability and support initiatives. Particularly ones that aim to address knowledge and confidence gaps. These were thought to be useful for both employers and service leavers. Across a list of provision options, workshops were regarded as the most effective, particularly for sharing lived experiences of service leavers.

Although workshops were deemed as the most valuable, a few key takeaways should be noted. Practical and interactive workshops were preferred particularly over presentations and PowerPoint learning. Bite-sized sessions that are in-person were regarded as the most effective, particularly for engagement. Whereas tailored online learning and resources pose risks of disengagement unless it's very interactive.

“That's the type of stuff that needs to happen - workshops, bringing in service leavers that can talk about their transitions, then bite size, training workshops.”

Guest speakers and keynote speakers were felt to be very effective, and employers cited an interest in either participating in or delivering sessions. Some employers noted examples of current or past engagements particularly around delivering/attending speeches or attending workshops that support service leaver employability.

“We regularly hold team meetings within the social value team, and we do actively look for guest speakers. So that would be something I feel like would be beneficial for the team.”

Employers felt that keynote speakers for service leaver employability sessions should be led by service leavers. Hearing real-life stories and experiences of service leavers was thought to be a better way of employers and support providers to better understand the needs of service leavers to support their transition into civilian life particularly in employment.

“Especially hearing real stories — both successes and failures. Hearing from veterans who've made transitions, started businesses, or struggled but bounced back can really help.”

Recommendations for support targeted at service leavers related to inclusivity, outreach, and peer support. Some employers that were service leavers highlighted the importance of ensuring support events cater to different service leavers engaging potential participants to make sure that courses and events are relevant. Outreach should also recognise that not all service leavers, particularly younger ones will actively seek opportunities.

“If it's a service leavers' event that is pitched at a level that would naturally appeal to kind of senior/major level, you're not then going to get those younger service leavers attending.”

Partnering with education and skills providers

There was a strong willingness amongst employers to partner with education and skills providers to improve policy and practice for service leavers. Many employers cited examples

of ongoing activity in this field. Examples included partnering with local colleges and councils as enterprise advisors, attending armed forces open days, offering internships, etc.

“I use my story to inspire young people — showing that even if you don’t start well, you can achieve if you work hard and have passion. Partnering more on this would be something I’d love to do.”

Employers emphasised the importance of partnerships showcasing the value of employing service leavers, while also highlighting accessible career pathways. Particularly for raising awareness around the transferable skillsets, reliability, punctuality, and added value that service leavers can bring to organisations. It was noted that becoming service leaver-aware can contribute to employers having a better understanding of how to be inclusive of service leavers as well as understanding how to retain service leavers in employment. Many of the existing partnerships offer opportunities for employers to attend workshops, guest lectures, and employability fairs. However, there is a distinct lack of awareness of resources available centred around service leaver employability.

“I’d happily get involved if there was a workshop for veterans and I would have to go through how the job boards work and what employers look for.”

Employers also referenced a desire to be involved in partnerships that offer sector specific opportunities, emphasising the importance of industry-led resource. As well, accessible and practical opportunities were noted to be important for partnerships. As employers can often be disincentivised by the costs of attending training provision, particularly if there is no clear output.

“I’m contemplating approaching my own regiment’s resettlement officer and saying look... I can provide them some sector specific advice and guidance and potentially signpost them to training organisations or things that they can do to make them more employable and potentially signpost them to employers.”

Good practice

Employers shared examples of good practice in employment and skills for service leavers such as inclusivity, engagement, progression structures and recognition. Many firms have made progress in inclusive recruitment and providing equal opportunities while also recognising diversity and being flexible to accommodate different needs. As well, employers highlighted the importance of good workplace culture and the impact this can have on employee retention, particularly with service leavers. It was noted that this relies heavily on the management skills of the organisation and an understanding of military culture and the potential risks and challenges that service leavers face.

“You have to make people feel welcome from day one, part of the team and making sure that everybody understands within the team what their role is and how that interlaces with everybody else’s.”

Some employers referenced best practice through inclusive recruitment processes. This involved adjustments to the interview process such as starting with informal conversations to build trust with service leavers and to make them feel comfortable. It was highlighted that service leavers value having peer network systems in place during employment, which help with the process of transitioning to civilian life and dealing with any risks or challenges.

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

Employers also noted having introduced progression frameworks, incentives, and CPD opportunities for service leavers. These were in response to service leavers valuing clear career pathways and incentives for progression and development. While some employers are demonstrating good practice through participation in service leaver-specific initiatives. For example, signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant, providing training-to-employment programmes, and offering free training days for service leavers. One employer referenced having achieved gold status on the Employer Recognition Scheme, which “encourages employers to support defence and inspire other organisations to do the same”.¹⁰

“We’ve had homeless veterans come to us, we’ve had people that have been unemployed ... we’ve helped them get jobs, we’ve signposted them direct to employers based on the training we’ve given them. We’ve even gone as far as getting jobs and then giving somebody the qualification to actually fulfil that job.”

Where to start?

The most common suggestions on how to better support and meet the needs of service leavers were to: 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.

One of the most referenced points was around changing perceptions of service leavers. The message needs to be reinforced that service leavers should be seen as assets that can bring valuable skills to organisations. If there is a more widespread understanding of the positive impacts of employing service leavers then more employers will be likely to engage with employability support initiatives. Employers felt that employing service leavers should be promoted as good business practice and should not have to be incentivised by monetary gain but instead by the positive impacts and social value.

“I don’t think there’s any value in providing monetary gain... as what you end up with is a scenario where people will employ people under the wrong reasons.”

“The civilian world is missing a trick. If they don’t see veterans as an absolute positive and an absolute win for their organisations when it comes to employing them.”

Employer engagement was a key recommendation. As demonstrated through previous sections in this report South Yorkshire is home to some best practice around employment of service leavers which should be showcased. A list of service leaver friendly employers was suggested. Some employers felt that involving them earlier in the resettlement process is a must. Engagement that starts from leaving the services and all the way through to ongoing support while in employment is crucial for retention and a smooth resettlement process. Examples for better employer-service leaver engagement included: more networking events, job forums and workshops to connect service leavers with employers. The chambers can play a role in acting as the connectors and advocates.

“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.”

It was felt that to raise awareness and understanding, listening to service leavers directly on the challenges they might face during their resettlement process is key. Employers

¹⁰ GOV.UK, Defence Employer Recognition Scheme. [Available here.](#)

advocated for including service leavers in employability events and workshops as guest speakers. It's important that employers can tailor their support to cater for a diverse variety of service leavers, to ensure that different needs are met and different challenges and barriers are understood. Involving service leavers directly in the learning process is regarded as vital.

“It's not a one-size-fits-all...there may be challenges involved and the last thing an employer wants is that they failed in being able to support.”

There are many measures in place to support service leavers, but the research has shown that understanding is mixed. More connections could be made between those interacting with leavers and there is an opportunity for providers to work in partnership the CTP, Job Centre Plus and the MoD. This might include participating or hosting regional CTP careers, recruitment and training events or offering training through the CTP ex forces employment programme.

Providers could work with military charities to offer training tasters (TechVets for instance works with partners who offer training for career paths into IT from Project Management to Cyber Security) and build strong links with armed forces champions in Jobcentre Plus to ensure they have good knowledge of training opportunities.

Chambers could play a key role working with local authority armed covenant leads to promote the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) which encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same and take a positive stance towards reserves, cadet force adult volunteers and veterans who are either existing or prospective employees.

Appendix one: consultees

- 24Hour IT
- ACW
- Adrian Hunt
- AESSEAL
- Andy File Associates
- BCAS
- Citizens Advice
- Compressed Air
- Dale Law
- Doncaster College
- DWP
- Elecomm
- Ellgia
- EnviroElectronics
- Equans
- Evermill & Willmott Dixon
- GXO
- Keepmoat
- KH Plant Training
- Mac McPherson
- Masonite
- Moonraker
- Northern Rail
- PG-Sol
- Redline
- SCC
- Shoal
- Thales
- VA Rotherham



Accelerating digital transformation

