UNDERSTANDING
SERVICE LEAVERS AGED 50+
THEIR CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES IN THE CIVILIAN JOBS MARKET

A study for the Officers' Association
with funding from the Forces in Mind Trust

Professor Matt Flynn and Dr Chris Ball
Centre for Research into the Older Workforce
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OFFICERS'
ASSOCIATION

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SUCCESSFUL SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION

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FOREWORDS

Lee Holloway
CEO, Officers' Association

We work with officer job seekers of all ages providing specialist employment advice as they transition from military to civilian employment. Some make this move easily and require minimum support. For others however, this journey can be more challenging, with further support needed over a longer period of time.

One age group consistently stands out as experiencing increased difficulties in transitioning – those aged 50 years and over. While there is a growing body of evidence testifying to the barriers facing all veterans seeking employment, none has examined the particular hurdles faced by this age group.

Our Armed Forces is a young workforce by both necessity and design and, to ensure a continuous flow of new talent through the ranks, most of our senior personnel have to leave by the age of 55. Finding yourself searching for your first civilian position after a lifetime of military service is never going to be easy. Nor does it make economic or social sense to have highly skilled military personnel economically inactive. Older workers are crucial to the future of the UK economy, and of course we all benefit from their tax revenues if they're in work.

We were delighted that FiMT, like the OA, recognised the need to undertake this study and decided to fund the research and the Centre for Older Workers (CROW) were equally responsive. All of us aim to provide a belated voice for over 50+ Service leavers looking to build a rewarding second career.

Our findings are complex. Whilst over a third of 50+ Service leavers reported experiencing ageism, anti-military bias or both, there are growing numbers of employers recognising the value of military experience and skills to their business. Employment is high in the UK and just over half of 50+ Service leavers are securing civilian work before leaving the military. Yet, dig deeper and we discover that 1 in 5 are working in non-permanent positions such as casual employment, some because they are unable to find sustainable long-term employment.

More can be done to align the needs of older veterans available and wanting to work for longer with the quality and diversity of the work on offer. This report lays bare our recommendations and argues for further cohesive thinking and actions between our Armed Forces, MOD and employers, but mostly, it adds to the momentum gathering pace, of continuing to support this country's veterans into employment, long after they have supported us.

Ray Lock
Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

In eight years at Forces in Mind Trust, I've found that it's rarely helpful to apply my own experiences of transition from military to civilian life to the types of study we commission. And the challenges facing a departing 52-year old air marshal (other Services are available) who joined 34 years earlier surely can't apply to everyone?

Well it turns out, rather satisfyingly, that most of them can. This report resonates with me personally in part thanks to my experiences in 2012, but also because it returns to some key themes and recommendations that span every piece we've ever written on the subject of transition in my time at Forces in Mind Trust.

Leavers should take individual responsibility, plan well ahead, translate qualifications and make them transferable, get to know the civilian environment (workplace and recruiting) whilst in service, help civilian employers understand the qualities ex-Service personnel bring and overcome mis-perceptions and prejudice. Perhaps unsurprisingly, if you mix the negatives of 50+ job hunting with ex-military disadvantage, you end up with another 'double whammy', a phrase we first applied to describe the challenges faced by female Service leavers. And there are similarities.

Spare a thought then for the 50+ female Service leaver from an ethnic minority.

But to think that those leaving the Services are alone would be a mistake. Our sister Trust 'The Centre for Ageing Better' reports that over 800,000 people in

the UK aged between 50 and 65 want to be working but are not, and that getting them into the right employment could contribute £18 billion worth of GDP. Fixing this would benefit everyone.

We commissioned this work to answer the simple question – where are Service leavers aged 50+ suffering disadvantage, and how can this be overcome? And at the end of every report we commission, we expect a call to action, something that readers can rally behind, and that we as a Trust can take to policy makers and others to fix.

In our policy statement on employment, which I commend, we call for better recognition by employers of the skills and expertise that Service leavers bring, and an attitudinal shift in the understanding of employers (and wider society) of the benefits that ex-Service personnel and their families bring. This report makes it abundantly clear that these are the correct policy goals, and that they apply to the 50+ workforce in even greater measure. Ambitious goals perhaps, but the right ones.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

50+ Service leaver: The term used in this study to designate someone who is in the process of, or has already left, the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50. Where we refer to people who are currently transitioning out of (leaving) the Armed Forces, we designate them as such. People who have completely left the Armed Forces (and who are either in civilian work, unemployed or retired), are referred to as former Service people.

Armed Forces: The Royal Navy (RN), Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) of the United Kingdom, sometimes referred to as 'the Services'. Although functionally similar to the Army, the Royal Marines are part of the Royal Navy, not a separate Service. The Army is the biggest service in terms of numbers, having more personnel than the RN and RAF combined.

Armed Forces Covenant: The Covenant is a pledge made by businesses, government, charities and communities to support current and former members of the Armed Forces in areas including housing, education, healthcare, financial assistance, and employment.

Career Transition Partnership (CTP): The Ministry of Defence's (MOD's) official Armed Forces resettlement programme, delivered under contract by an external commercial provider (Right Management). CTP provides resettlement support, career transition advice, and training opportunities for leavers from any rank or service.

Career Transition Partnership Annual Statistics (CTPAS): Statistical bulletins produced by CTP on employment outcomes of Service leavers six months after leaving the Armed Forces.

Commissioned Officer: An officer appointed by Queen's commission. This is what is normally understood by the term 'officer' in the Armed Forces (e.g. in the Army, commissioned officers are Second Lieutenant and above).

Employer Recognition Scheme: A scheme run by the Ministry of Defence to support employers to support Service leavers and their family members. The scheme recognises good practice carried out by employers through bronze, silver and gold awards.

Enlisted Ranks: A term sometimes used for servicemen or servicewomen who joined the Armed Forces at entry-level (e.g. as a private in the Army) with the prospect of subsequent promotion through the ranks.

Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS): Time-limited appointments to fill posts that need a serviceman or servicewoman (i.e. cannot be civilianised), but generally do not have a liability for operational deployments. FTRS posts can be filled by an ex-regular or a reservist.

Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO): A serviceman or servicewoman holding a more junior position of authority (or rank) in the Armed Force through promotion by merit through the enlisted ranks.

Officers' Association (OA): A charity whose charitable object is to promote the welfare of former commissioned officers.

Other Rank (OR): The term used by the Ministry of Defence to designate all Service people other than commissioned officers.

Petty Officer: A senior NCO in the Royal Navy (equivalent to Sergeant or above in the Army or RAF).

Regular: A full-time member of the Armed Forces.

Reservist: A part-time member of the Armed Forces. Reservists may previously have been a regular but most have not. In most cases, they will also have a civilian job in parallel with their reserve service. Reservists are generally excluded from this study as a result (although see FTRS).

RFEA: The charity whose mission is to promote employment opportunities for all Service people (focusing on non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and junior enlisted Service people).

Senior Rank: A generic term for Service people who are ranked between and including Sergeant and Warrant Officer (in the Royal Navy, they are known as Senior Rates). (By contrast, Junior Rates / Ranks are Leading Hands / Corporals and below; they are excluded from the study as very few if any 50+ Service people are junior ranks.)

UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS): A survey carried out by the Ministry of Defence to gauge attitudes and perspectives of Service people to major programmes and policies affecting their careers in the Armed Forces.

Veteran: A former (normally regular) member of the Armed Forces. Throughout the report, we use the term Service leaver rather than veteran.

Warrant Officer: The ranks immediately below commissioned officer, and above NCOs. Appointed by Queen's warrant.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report seeks to identify the unique challenges faced by 50+ Service leavers and ways in which employers can support them into work. It presents findings from a project conducted on behalf of the Officers' Association by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW).

The project was funded by Forces in Mind Trust. The project explored the experiences of Service leavers of all ranks transitioning out of the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50 (referred to henceforth as 50+ Service leavers) and searching for work in the civilian job market.

Discussions were held with 50+ Service leavers (both currently transitioning and those who had completed the process) and employers. Through a series of interviews and workshops, the project investigated 50+ Service leavers' experiences of and attitudes towards transition. In addition, it revealed examples of good practices being undertaken by employers and the perspectives of managers who engaged with 50+ Service leavers in civilian employment.

BACKGROUND

The Armed Forces have a predominantly younger workforce. Nearly all Service people join between seventeen and twenty-four years of age.

The demanding nature of Service life (with frequent operational and training deployments and anti-social working hours and conditions) means that most choose to leave after eight to twelve years of service (MOD, 2018b). Net outflow before the age of 35 has recently been 122%[1] (MOD, 2015).

The intensely physical nature of most junior officers' and non-commissioned officers' roles and the need for a steady flow of new talent up through the rank structure means that there are relatively few opportunities for continued employment beyond the mid-thirties, especially in more junior roles.

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1   Figures are over 100% because from 2012-2016, the Armed Forces was implementing a redundancy programme (Dempsey, 2019) Therefore, during this period, more under-thirty year old were leaving the Armed Forces than joining

The Armed Forces' employment structures are designed accordingly, with initial contracts of engagement being for a maximum of twelve years and only those assessed with leadership potential in commissioned roles or with particular skills being offered an extended contract of up to twenty-four years.

There is nonetheless a need to retain mid-ranking officers, as well as some warrant officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) beyond the twenty-four year point (i.e. beyond their mid-forties) where their experience will be particularly valuable and the role cannot be civilianised. Some of this group of individuals, as well as commissioned officers, could well serve beyond the age of fifty.

However, the same imperative of ensuring a steady flow of new talent up through the rank structure means that almost all need to leave by fifty-five in order to create opportunities for those coming up behind them, and even the most senior officers will leave by the age of sixty, for the same reason.

This explains why the Armed Forces have a steady outflow of older service leavers at an age where, in civilian life, most of the wider working population could expect ten or more years of continued employment, and would be unlikely to be considering a change of career.

> **ALMOST ALL [SERVICE LEAVERS] NEED TO LEAVE BY FIFTY-FIVE IN ORDER TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE COMING UP BEHIND THEM**

PURPOSE

There were two contextual questions for this research: first, whether 50+ Service leavers experience the process of finding suitable work as more challenging than their younger equivalents, and second, whether 50+ Service leavers experience job seeking as more difficult than older workers generally.

The answers to both questions are complex. On the one hand, skills which have been acquired through military service are generally valued by employers. Further, the support which is provided by the Armed Forces to facilitate a smooth transition to civilian work is greater than most employers would provide older employees who are seeking a new career.

Comparing the experiences of 50+ Service leavers with other groups of workers (for example, those who leave the military at a younger age or civilian older workers) can provide insight into the challenges which they face in making a late career job transition. Accordingly, we use CROW's previous work on the older workforce as well as MOD data on Armed Forces personnel to provide a context. However, to understand the unique experience of 50+ Service leavers in seeking valuable and stable work, it is important to talk with them directly and examine what they say on their own terms- not just relative to other groups of more frequently studied workers. Therefore, the core of this research project involved workshops and surveys of 50+ Service leavers themselves (both those who were in the process of transitioning and those who already had done so) as well as employers who are seeking their skills, knowledge and experience.

KEY FINDINGS

The research project had five objectives.

1   To understand the perception of 50+ Service leavers regarding the barriers and challenges to mid-career transitions

- **Experiences of 50+ Service leavers in the civilian labour market is varied, but a significant minority struggle to find work which they value and makes good use of their skills and abilities.** While 40% of older former Service people said that finding their first job after transitioning out of the military was easy, a third said it was difficult. A majority said that they had found a civilian job before completely leaving the Armed Forces, but 13% said that they had been unable to find work six months after their transitions. 50+ Service leavers are not alone in struggling to make mid-career job transitions. Entering a new profession can be especially difficult given that employers generally prioritise experience gained in the industry over that achieved outside of it. 50+ Service people often find it challenging to demonstrate that their military acquired skills can be valuable to civilian employers.

- **50+ Service leavers report widespread experiences of discrimination**. 30% of people who have left the Armed Forces at this age have experienced ageism when looking for civilian work and 28% say that they have experienced anti-military bias. Sometimes, these prejudices were experienced directly while at other times people reported a sense of being treated unfavourably. Although workplace age discrimination is unlawful, employers continue to hold and act on assumptions about older workers' capabilities, performance and expectations in work.

  A recent survey by CROW of workers aged 50-65 showed that only two-thirds of older workers feel that their employers treat everyone the same regardless of age (Davies, Van der Heijden, & Flynn, 2017). Experiences with ageism can be made worse when combined with other forms of discrimination. In fact, 23% of 50+ Service leavers reported experiences of both ageism and anti-military bias.

- **50+ Service leavers are generally encouraged to maintain personal development plans (PDPs) throughout their military service.** However, pressures in work can often make finding time to career plan difficult. These pressures can be especially felt by Service people who are stationed overseas and who have struggled to access career-building resources.

- **Many 50+ Service leavers say they feel a sense of loss on leaving the Armed Forces**. Two in five older former Service leavers say they have thought about returning to military service at least occasionally since transitioning to civilian life.

33% found securing their first civilian job difficult

1 in 5 are working in non-permanent positions such as self-employment, portfolio work or casual employment

30% experienced ageism and

28% experienced anti-military bias

41% had applied for work below their skill levels

53% secured civilian work before leaving the Armed Forces

85% find their civilian jobs interesting

59% are happy with their salaries

34% state leadership as their most important skill

but only **10%** of employers rate this for new hires

49% of employers agreed that 50+ Service leavers have skills their business can benefit from

1 in 4 employers do not consider Service experience relevant to their industries

2

To understand employers' perception and motivations regarding recruiting 50+ Service leavers and the benefits and challenges they bring to their organisations and gaps between their perceptions and those of 50+ Service leavers

- **There is a significant mismatch between the skills which 50+ Service leavers have to offer and what employers say they need.** What older Service leavers have to offer employers is not always what employers say they want. The skill which older Service leavers say they have which is most important is leadership, but only 10% of employers say that leadership skills are what they are looking for. The two skills which employers say they are in most need of are technical skills and industry-based experience, but only 15% and 13% respectively of 50+ Service leavers say that these as the most valuable skills they have to offer.

- **Employers generally recognise and value the skills which 50+ Service leavers have to offer.** They say that employers can make good use of military skills, that 50+ Service leavers have a good range of experience and that they are dedicated and loyal. However, many employers struggle to match the skills of older Service leavers with the needs of their organisation and one in four say that they would be dissuaded from employing older former Service people who lack experience in their industries.

- **Perceptions which employers have of 50+ Service leavers often do not match reality.** For example, many employers think of older Service people as being regimented and unadaptable, but Service leavers themselves say that military service requires them to be resilient within the context of uncertainty and change. While there is a widespread perception that older Service leavers have career and salary expectations which are unrealistically high, Service leavers themselves report a range of aspirations for their post-military careers.

- **Some employers recognise the difficulties which older Service leavers have in applying for work.** Examples of supportive practices include insight days, guaranteed job interviews to Service people, job placements, and the allocation of Service mentors.

3 To understand how 50+ Service leavers experience transition out of the Armed Forces and into civilian work

- **Reaching the military pension age was the most common reason for 50+ Service leavers deciding to transition out of the Armed Forces.** More of them reported being 'pushed' out of military Service by, for example, being told they would have to leave (28%) than being 'pulled' by opportunities in the civilian world such as 'wanting to try something new' (22%).

- **Family context shapes decision-making of 50+ Service leavers in terms of the timing of transitions out of the Armed Forces**. Some said that they transitioned out of military service due to pressure from a partner. For others, decisions were influenced by family responsibilities, such as having a young family or needing to care for an elderly relative.

- **While most 50+ Service leavers find work before or soon after leaving the Armed Forces, a minority experience long term unemployment, under-employment or precarious work.** Being unable to secure stable work can have an impact on the Service leaver's mental health and sense of identity, as well as financial well-being. Service leavers who had been out of work for an extended period reported feeling hopeless about ever being able to find work.

- **50+ Service leavers said that their main priorities when looking for work were to find a role which is interesting (75%), made good use of their skills (67%) and made them feel valued (52%)**. Some said that when they had left the Armed Forces, they were unsure of the kind of civilian work they wanted and thought that career counselling could help to focus their job search strategies. To add context, a survey by CROW showed that half of older workers more generally say interesting work is their number one priority (Davies et al., 2017), although many say they look for work which will enable them to reduce work pressure (McNair, Flynn, Owen, Humphreys, & Woodfield, 2004).

ONE IN FIVE 50+ FORMER SERVICE EPOPLE IS IN NON-PERMANENT WORK

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To identify strategies which 50+ Service leavers take in finding and securing work which they value and the support which they need in doing so

- **50+ Service leavers with long military service can struggle in navigating a civilian jobs market which they have not participated in for decades, if at all.** 21% rated their CV writing skills as poor, while 44% said they lacked confidence in negotiating their pay and conditions of service.

- **Social networks were cited by most 50+ Service leavers as crucial in the job search process.** When applying for a job, knowing another Service leaver in the prospective workplace was thought to be particularly important. However, not everyone felt confident in their networking skills with one in four saying their networks outside the military were poor.

- **Some 50+ Service leavers reported making efforts to hide their age and/or past military service when looking for work.** For example, some Service leavers reported taking up training and job placement opportunities in order to develop their civilian job experience and de-emphasise their military service.

- **Some 50+ Service leavers said they struggled to understand the customs and practices of the job searching process** and thought that they could benefit from help in taking part in an interview, requesting feedback, handling rejections and making best use of social media.

5

To gain insights about 50+ Service leavers' careers once they have made their transition out of the Armed Forces, and understand what they consider to be a successful transition

- **50+ Service leavers generally said they were happy with the work which they had found in the civilian world.** 85% described their work as interesting; 59% were happy with their salaries; and 72% said their work made good use of their skills. However, a significant minority say they feel unhappy with their jobs with 40% saying that their work fails to make them feel valued; 35% said they were not working in a supportive work environment; and 25% reported that their work made it difficult to meet families' needs.

- **One in five 50+ former Service people is in non-permanent work such as self-employment, portfolio work or casual employment.** Some reported choosing non-permanent employment as a way to exploit rare and sought after skills they possessed or to be their own boss, while others said they were unable to find permanent work.

- **Many Service leavers reported having made multiple job transitions since leaving the Armed Forces.** Some older former Service people noted that they had tried many jobs in the civilian world before settling into work which they felt matched their skills and aspirations. It was emphasised that mid-career Service leavers should avoid planning for their first civilian job to be their last one.

- **On average 50+ Service leavers said they planned to retire at the age of 63.** However, there was a wide variety of retirement plans and one in four had no plans to retire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the research allowed a number of recommendations to be made to help overcome the barriers and challenges Service leavers face. Some of the recommendations focus on the Service leavers themselves while others concern organisations which support Service leavers into civilian work. A second publication from this research offers recommendations to employers on making the best use of 50+ Service leavers' skills, experience and capabilities.

Recommendations are organised according to the support which 50+ Service people can benefit from before, during and after their transition out of the Armed Forces.

A THIRD OF EX-SERVICE PEOPLE SAID THAT THEIR TRANSITION INTO CIVILIAN EMPLOYMENT WAS DIFFICULT

1 Civilian career planning before leaving the Armed Forces

A need to ensure consistent maintenance of personal development plans (PDP): In his review of military transition processes, Lord Ashcroft (2014) recommended that Service people be instructed to maintain PDPs which chronicle the skills they have acquired through military service that can later be used in finding civilian work. While most Service leavers reported being encouraged by their commanding officers to maintain PDPs, many also said that they struggled to do so, especially when they are on demanding assignments. Military assignments which provide the most valuable skills can often cost Service people the time they need to maintain their PDPs. Ensuring that PDPs are current and well-documented is particularly important for people who leave the Armed Forces after 50. However, some whom we spoke to said that there were gaps in their PDPs, especially while they were in high pressured roles.

A need for career planning for 50+ Service leavers: Service leavers were generally (though not exclusively) positive about the support which they received from the Armed Forces and the Career Transition Partnership (CTP)[1] in terms of developing and enhancing their employability skills such as CV writing or capacity to take part in a job interview. However, some 50+ Service leavers are unsure about what they want in terms of a civilian career and uncertain about what kinds of occupations would suit their skills. Some Service leavers have said that they would like more help in planning their civilian careers. While CTP could lead a programme of career planning, employers could make an important contribution by providing opportunities for Service leavers to experience work in different sectors through job placements, apprenticeships and short-term engagements.

Supporting reservists: Many 50+ Service leavers decide to join the Reserves upon transitioning out of Regular service. Being a reservist can help 50+ Service leavers to maintain access to military support like training which can help reservists progress in their civilian careers as well as maintain their connections with the military community. Encouraging 50+ Service leavers to consider becoming reservists also benefits the Armed Forces which can retain their skills and knowledge, acquired through long service.

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2   CTP is the MOD's official provider of Armed Forces resettlement.

2   Smoothing the transition to civilian work

A need for flexibility with the last appointment in the Forces: Some Service leavers reported missing out on civilian work secured early in their transition because employers could not wait for them to complete their military service. This can create anxiety across the two-year transition process. Early in the transition, they doubt their ability to find a job which will be open once they complete their service, while towards the end of the transition, Service leavers worry about being able to find work before they become unemployed. Employers have a role in helping to bridge the transition process and many are happy to work with Service leavers in fixing their starting dates of new employment. However, Service leavers say that greater flexibility during their last assignment could also smooth the transition process. One option might be to offer transitioning Service leavers phased arrangements, in which they gradually reduce military service while stepping into a new role in the civilian workforce.

Redeploying transitioning 50+ Service people to mentoring roles: Service leavers who are in phased transitions could mentor colleagues or help their successors transition into the role. Phased retirement models have been developed in the UK and throughout Europe which both enable older workers some flexibility with how and when they retire and provide organisational benefits like knowledge retention and supporting younger workers in setting into new roles. Employers like BAE Systems and BT have developed systems to enable older workers and their managers to negotiate work arrangements for their final years of work. (Flynn, 2014) While 50+ Service leavers are usually transitioning from one career to another, the MOD can draw good practice from other organisations' approaches to managing exit processes.

Supporting 50+ Service leavers in planning their first job interviews: Many 50+ Service leavers spend the first year of their transitions researching their civilian career options, as well as training and networking, and their second year sending out job applications and interviewing. However, there are no rigid rules about the best time to start applying for jobs. Some 50+ Service leavers may need longer to apply for jobs, especially if they lack experience in the civilian job market and delaying the time at which they start to apply for jobs can carry risks. For this reason, it is important that both the Armed Forces and civilian employers are as flexible as they can be in terms of leave and start dates in order to support 50+ Service leavers in making successful transitions into sustainable civilian employment.

A need for negotiating skills: Employers frequently say that 50+ Service leavers need to manage their expectations when seeking work, but often from the Service leaver's perspective, it is the employers' expectations which are unclear. Service leavers say that many employers have assumptions about their career expectations, ability to fit into the team, and dedication to stay in the job in the long term. Some reported that prospective employers expected them to work on a reduced salary because if they were continuing to draw a military pension. Differences in expectations between Service leavers and prospective employers could be addressed through honest and open discussions, either before or at an early stage in their employment, but Service leavers said they lacked the skills to undertake these. CTP could offer training on negotiating salaries and work conditions. Organisations like trade unions and professional bodies already offer such support and might be persuaded to extend such training to Service leavers. An initiative to raise the awareness of Service leavers' needs with employee organisations could perhaps be taken.

Fostering networks of Service leavers: Many 50+ Service leavers said that they had secured employment with the help of other Service leavers who acted as mentors, advisors, advocates and a sympathetic ear. Several organisations facilitate networks between Service leavers including the Officers' Association and RFEA as well as local authorities (We visited a Veterans' Hub in Hull for example.) and employers. Such network building is indispensable for 50+ Service leavers as they try to get a foot in the door of industries in which they would like to work.

EMPLOYERS GENERALLY HAD POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE LEAVERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LONG MILITARY SERVICE

3 Advocating for 50+ Service leavers

Challenging ageism and anti-military bias:
Experiences of discrimination are common amongst 50+ Service leavers with 42% of them saying that they experienced ageism, anti-military bias or both when seeking employment. A few examples of direct discrimination (like offensive name-calling) were reported, but more often employers held assumptions about 50+ Service leavers, such as them being 'too regimented,' which did not match reality. Employers could extend the provisions of existing diversity and inclusion policies and practices, to combat bias against 50+ Service leavers. Employer associations, Service charities and the MOD itself could lead the way by promoting good practice in challenging discrimination faced by this group.

Reaching small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): Some of the employers who took part in the focus groups were signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant (AFC). Signing the AFC and applying to be a member of the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) were seen as valuable for participating organisations in helping them to recruit talented people, making the best use of military skills, and demonstrating their commitment to meet corporate social responsibilities. However, it was also recognised that businesses which are facing the greatest skills shortages are also the least aware of the capabilities of 50+ Service leavers. While not every organisation has the Human Resource Management (HRM) capacity to join the AFC, the principles of being a Forces Friendly Employer could be applied within organisations of all sizes. An outreach campaign to SMEs could connect 50+ Service leavers with organisations which are in most need of their skills and experience.

SERVICE LEAVERS WHO HAVE BEEN UNEMPLOYED FOR A LONG TIME SAY THAT THEY FEEL ISOLATED AND SOMETIMES ABANDONED

4 Supporting self-employed, precarious workers, and the unemployed

A need for support for self-employed and portfolio workers: While many 50+ Service leavers want secure and full-time employment, others are hoping to set out on their own through self-employment or portfolio work[2]. They may choose such work arrangements because they feel that they have marketable skills in high demand, want autonomy over when they work and what kinds of jobs they take on, or simply because they value the feeling of being their own bosses. They may also choose self-employment or portfolio working because they have struggled to find permanent work. People who are interested in these work arrangements say that they would like more support in organising and managing their own businesses. They say that they would benefit from training in financial management, marketing, finding clients and using their networks to find work.

A need to support unemployed and under-employed Service leavers: While most 50+ Service leavers said that they had found work soon after or even before leaving military service, some struggled to find work. The longer the period of

their unemployment, the more anxious they felt. Service leavers who have been unemployed for a long time say that they feel isolated and sometimes abandoned by the Armed Forces, military community and employers. Bespoke support for long term unemployed 50+ Service leavers, offering them career planning, work placements and a job mentor could help them make a successful transition.

A recent review carried out by the charity Shaw Trust noted that employers in sectors facing chronic skills shortages are developing work programmes to match the skills which older unemployed have with the skills with which employers face a shortage (Shaw Trust and TAEN, 2014). A works programme could include work placements which enable the job seeker to demonstrate how their skills could be remobilised. Such programmes could also include retraining which for many employers would be a modest investment which could pay dividends in terms of bringing in new skills in occupations which they have struggled to fill. CTP should consider working with AFC signatory employers to develop and pilot programmes to support 50+ Service leavers who have been unemployed for over six months to transition into sustainable work.

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2   A portfolio worker works on a number of different projects often for different clients.

5   Supporting 50+ Service leavers across the life course

Supporting Service leavers in subsequent transitions: For many, if not most 50+ Service leavers, the job change which they make when leaving the Armed Forces is not their last one. It often takes Service leavers a long time and several transitions before they find work which suits them, and many may opt for job transitions as circumstances change in terms of family, finances and personal ambitions. Some may also be forced into a job change through redundancy or health problem. Former Service people with whom we spoke offered future Service leavers the advice that their first civilian job is unlikely to be their last. While some Service leavers say that each job change gives them the chance to improve their employability skills, others report difficulties in making job changes, especially as they approach retirement age.

The MOD provides comprehensive support to people transitioning out of the Armed Forces, but Service leavers experiencing job change between civilian jobs said that the support which they received was limited and variable. Allowing Armed Forces people to access career services (such as those provided by CTP during transition) throughout their civilian careers, could be an effective way of ensuring successful transitions. It would reinforce the principle that people who have given long service to their country are supported throughout their lives. It would also help employers tap into the skills and experience which Service leavers have to offer. Given the long-standing commitment of the OA and RFEA in supporting Service people, responsibility for providing career support across the life course could be shared between the MOD, CTP and these membership organisations.

METHODS AND SAMPLES

The core of the research was carried out through discussions with three groups of people:

- Service leavers who had transitioned out of the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50[3]

- Service leavers who at the time of the research were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces and would be completing their transitioning at or after the age of 50[4]

- Managers who work in civilian organisations and who had responsibilities for recruiting staff.[5]

Service leavers who participated were from all military ranks - the project embraced the experiences of 50+ Service leavers who were both officers and senior ranks[6] in the civilian job market.

Throughout the project, the perspectives of the three groups were compared and contrasted. For example, the expectations of people who were currently transitioning out of the Armed Forces about their job prospects in the civilian job market were compared with the job search experiences of people who have completed the transition process. Further, perceptions held by managers of 50+ Service people's capabilities, expectations, and work ethics were compared with the reality as expressed by Service leavers themselves.

QUALITATIVE METHODS

Focus groups were conducted with present and future Service leavers and managers. Eleven focus group discussions were held with 50+ Service leavers (both current and former) in England and Scotland. With current Service people, researchers discussed their reasons for leaving the Armed Forces; their preparation for job searching outside of the military; and career plans after transition. Former Service people discussed their experiences in the job market and their careers after transition. One-on-one interviews with 50+ Service were conducted to complement focus group discussions. In total, thirty-six former Service people (twenty-five former officers and eleven former senior ranks) and twenty-two current Service people (sixteen officers and five senior ranks) were interviewed. Twenty-seven managers were interviewed in six focus groups and one on one interviews. Participants were asked to discuss their experiences with and perceptions of 50+ Service leavers.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS

An online questionnaire survey was conducted of 50+ Service leavers (both current and former Service people). A twenty-seven question questionnaire to explore the same career and employability issues which were considered in the focus groups was designed and piloted. 183 former Service people and thirty-five Service people who were currently transitioning then took part in the survey. Additionally, using a Survey Monkey Panel and a database provided by the Officers' Association, a survey was conducted of employers. A twenty-four question questionnaire was designed and piloted to measure their experiences and perceptions of 50+ Service leavers. 328 managers took part in the employer survey.

In addition to the focus groups and surveys, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Officers' Association, and Service charities.

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3   Ex-Service people included those who were employed in civilian work, reservists, self-employed, portfolio workers and unemployed. It excluded those who were retired.

4   Because the Armed Forces transition process is two years, current Service people we spoke to could be as young as 48 years old.

5   Managers included not only human resource managers, but also anyone who has responsibility for setting recruitment policies for the organisation or recruiting staff within their teams (e.g. line managers). Managers were recruited both from employers which are proactive in the employment of Service leavers (e.g. have signed the Armed Forces Covenant) and those which are not.

6   Senior ranks is defined as Service people who are ranked between and including Sergeant and Warrant Officer (in the Royal Navy, they are known as Senior Rates). Junior Ranks are Leading Hands or Corporals and below, although they are excluded from the study given that very few 50+ Service people are junior ranks.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This report embraces the experiences the experiences and expectations of Service leavers of all military ranks and was supported by organisations like the RFEA (The Forces Employment Charity), representing non-commissioned Service people.

Every year, approximately 1,200 Regular Service members aged 50 or over leave the Armed Forces (MOD, 2015: 10)[7]. Most will start to draw their pension with full benefits in the Armed Forces Pension Scheme starting at the age of 55. However, the majority will not leave the workforce entirely, but rather transition to a second career in the civilian workforce.

People who leave the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50 (hereafter referred to as 50+ Service leavers) are not unique in making a mid-life career transition. As people remain healthier and able to work longer, they may be keen for or need to make a career change in the latter part of their working lives. Some may aspire for a change of occupation or sector in which to work, or for new challenges and opportunities. Others may be forced to make a career change due to changing health or family circumstances. Table 1 shows the inflow and outflow of Service people by age. 75% of officers and 84% of other ranks join the Armed Forces before the age of twenty-five. 52% of other ranks leave the Armed Forces before thirty years of age. Officers continue their service longer, but by the age of 45, 57% have transitioned out. 28% of officers and 2.5% of other ranks leave the Armed Forces at or after the age of 50.

For 50+ Service leavers, making a successful job transition can be challenging in ways different than the transitions faced by most older job seekers. Most will have joined the Armed Forces directly after leaving education and therefore have no experience in the civilian job market other than job placements, apprenticeships or gap year jobs. For those who had worked in civilian jobs before entering the Armed Forces, their last experience as a job seeker was

decades ago before the job market was shaped by social media and new technology. They have distant memories of searching for jobs, interviewing with prospective employers, and marketing their skills and capabilities.

Many older job seekers rely on their social networks to find jobs, but 50+ Service leavers can find that their networks do not extend far outside of the military. The prospect of looking for employment in the civilian job market of which they have no or little experience may feel daunting and maintaining a positive outlook during the transition into civilian work can be a challenge. While some 50+ Service leavers transition out of the Armed Forces with a civilian job waiting for them, others feel anxious about entering a civilian labour market for which they feel inexperienced and culturally ill-prepared.

This is not to say that 50+ Service leavers do not have opportunities in the civilian labour market. UK job vacancies are at their highest levels since the turn of the millennium (Migration Advisory Committee, 2019) and many of the occupations which are facing the greatest skills shortages like engineers, scientists, directors and project managers (UKCES, 2015) are ones which Service leavers have skills to fill, albeit with some top-up training and support. Employers report struggling not only to find people with the skills required for the job, but also the right attitude and soft skills (CBI, 2018). They also think of people with military experience as being disciplined, willing to support their teams and having a strong work ethic (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009). At the same time, they consider older workers as loyal, hardworking and mature (McNair et al., 2004). Therefore, older Service leavers should be well-positioned to secure high-quality work which they value.

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7   When quoting MOD data on Service personnel, we use the most up to date information. However, data which is made public change from year to year which means that some data which is presented represents the last year it was published. In particular, the Annual Personnel Report was last published in 2014 when it was replaced by shorter quarterly reports.

TABLE 1:

UK REGULAR FORCES INFLOW AND OUTFLOW BY RANK AND AGE, FINANCIAL YEAR 2013/14

| | INFLOW | | | | OUTFLOW | | | |
| | OFFICERS | | OTHER RANKS | | OFFICERS | | OTHER RANKS | |
	NUMBER	% OF SERVICE	NUMBER	% OF SERVICE	NUMBER	% OF SERVICE	NUMBER	% OF SERVICE
Under 18	0	0.0%	2120	19.6%	0	0.0%	440	2.2%
18-19	40	3.8%	2700	25.0%	0	0.0%	950	4.7%
20-24	750	70.8%	4200	38.9%	70	2.7%	4430	21.8%
25-29	210	19.8%	1430	13.2%	270	10.2%	4630	22.7%
30-34	20	1.9%	290	2.7%	450	17.0%	3190	15.7%
35-39	20	1.9%	30	0.3%	300	11.4%	1840	9.0%
40-44	10	0.9%	30	0.3%	420	15.9%	3400	16.7%
45-49	10	0.9%	10	0.1%	410	15.5%	970	4.8%
50-54	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	560	21.2%	460	2.3%
55 and over	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	160	6.1%	50	0.2%

(MOD, 2015, P14)

Nevertheless, 50+ Service leavers face challenges in securing work. Although workplace age discrimination was made unlawful in 2006, ageism is still widespread in the job recruitment process and older job seekers face the risk of age bias counting against them (Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). While Service leavers are generally thought of positively, they also suffer from stereotypical judgments that link them with mental ill-health, aggressive behaviour or depressive conditions ('mad, bad and sad' (Pike, 2016)). While employers say they value former Service people for their discipline, decision-making and critical thinking, many are uncertain as to how, in their particular industries, they can use military acquired skills.

Within this context, the Officers' Association (with funding from Forces in Mind Trust) commissioned this study on the experiences of 50+ Service leavers transitioning out of the Armed Forces into civilian work. The research was undertaken by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce and carried out in four stages:

1) A literature review and review of existing datasets on Service leavers;

2) Interviews with Service leaver charities, the Ministry of Defence and Career Transition Partnership;

3) Focus group discussions with 50+ Service people who are leaving the Armed Forces and others who have already left and have secured civilian work;

4) A survey of Service leavers and employers.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Understand the perception of 50+ Service leavers regarding the barriers and challenges to mid-career transitions;

- Understand employers' perception and motivations regarding recruiting 50+ Service leavers and the benefits and challenges they bring to their organisations and gaps between their perceptions and those of 50+ Service leavers;

- Understand how 50+ Service leavers experience transition out of the Armed Forces and into civilian work;

- Identify strategies which 50+ Service leavers take in finding and securing work which they value and the support which they need in doing so;

- Gain insights about 50+ Service leavers' careers once they have made their transition out of the Armed Forces, and understand what they consider to be a successful transition.

Throughout the research, the perspectives of current and former Service people and employers were compared and contrasted with the aim of exploring firstly how the expectations of those currently transitioning out of the Armed Forces reflect the experiences of those who have already done so. Secondly, we sought to establish how far and in what ways, Service leavers' and employers' perceptions and expectations coincided or differed, perhaps creating barriers preventing the Service leavers' eventual settlement in a job role that meets his and the employer's needs.

The aim of the research was to generate a holistic picture of the 50+ Service leaver job market including both officers and senior ranks. The approach reflects the fact that apparent distinctions between officers and non-commissioned ranks are more nuanced than many might imagine. Officers generally have strong skills and experience in such fields as leadership and decision-making (which employers say they value) but many also have technical skills with relevance to civilian employers. Senior ranks have a wide variety of engineering or technical skills, which are in demand but many (particularly senior non-commissioned officers) have very good team leadership skills too. The nature and mix of soft and hard skills also vary between Service leavers from the three Armed Forces (Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force), and the different functional branches of each. On the face of it, therefore, there should be a place for all Service leavers as productive and important contributors to our national economy. Whether or not this potential is fully realised in practice is important for everyone – employers, the national economy and (not least) Service leavers themselves and their families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the current literature on career transitions and how the experience of 50+ Service leavers reflects the intersection of age with military status.

50+ Service leavers face challenges in finding work which they value in the civilian world. Many older people, in common with former Service leavers, experience difficulties in finding new jobs. Difficulties in applying previous work experience to new job opportunities; employers' biases against older people; or the lack of employability skills which are needed to find work in the modern labour market can become barriers to finding work and to some extent are common to both groups. For former Service people aged 50 and over, barriers to sustainable work caused by age and military status can reinforce one another and result in double discrimination. As a result, many 50+ Service leavers find themselves long-term unemployed, under-employed or forced into early retirement.

As the pension age continues to rise, both businesses and public policymakers are looking for ways to help older workers stay productive. Smoothing the transition of older job seekers from one job to another is part of the Government's Fuller Working Lives agenda (DWP, 2014). Although intake into the UK Armed Services peaked in the 1990s, the number of people leaving military Service has held steady with a growing cohort of mid- to late-career Service people leaving after many years of service (Ministry of Defence 2015). Government and businesses have an interest in helping older Service leavers into secure work, both because they have a duty to take care of those who served their country and in order to make the best use of skills, training and knowledge acquired in Service. This section discusses the overlapping challenges faced by older Service leavers when transitioning into civilian work and possible solutions to those barriers.

LITERATURE REVIEW APPROACH

This review aims to distil published evidence relating to older Service people in transitioning to civilian work. Publications were reviewed from academic sources, government-funded research, and literature from sources like commercial organisations and 'best practice' employers. The report aims to fill a gap in the literature, namely the lack of research on how age and military service intersect to impact on late-career employability. The reference frame was 2009-2018. Although we performed an international publication search, most of the literature originated from either the United Kingdom or the United States.

Our search strategy applied the following terms:
- Military transitions
- Military skills
- Military careers
- Age management
- Career management
- Recruitment
- Job rotation
- Lifelong learning
- Mentoring/Knowledge management
- Disabilities/reasonable accommodations
- Health management
- Age discrimination
- Disabilities discrimination

Second, we reviewed international literature on best practice, employer practices and government programmes in relation to the resettlement of military Service people. Such programmes include job placement support; tax and other incentives for employers to recruit Service people; training programmes and company based Corporate Social Responsibility programmes to seek former Service talent.

Responding to ageing demographics and skills shortages, there has been considerable attention focused on older workers generally and the UK government, employers and third sector organisations have developed tools to support managers in recruiting and retaining older workers (see (DWP, 2013; Flynn, 2015; McNair & Flynn, 2012)). At the same time, there is a body of literature and community of practice aimed at supporting employers in making good use of the skills and experiences of Service people who are leaving the military in order to pursue their careers in civilian workplaces For a review of programmes, see (Collins et al., 2014; Iversen et al., 2005). However, there is limited research which discusses age, military service and careers together. Additionally, about three in five military Service people aged 50 and over are warrant officers and non-commissioned officers (i.e. senior ranks) whose skills sets and qualifications and differ from officers and may well have different post-military career aspirations (Blackburn, 2016).

MANY OLDER PEOPLE, IN COMMON WITH FORMER SERVICE LEAVERS, EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES IN FINDING NEW JOBS

BARRIERS FACED BY 50+ FORMER SERVICE PEOPLE IN MAKING A TRANSITION INTO CIVILIAN WORK

About two-thirds of people who leave the Armed Forces (of all ages) do so through 'voluntary outflow'[8] (MOD, 2019). Two in five of serving military personnel have been actively searching for work outside the Services in the past year with the most common reasons in order of frequency being the impact of Service on the family, morale, job satisfaction, better career opportunities outside the Services, and dissatisfaction with pay (MOD, 2018c). These figures will be discussed in more detail in the following section. However, it is important to note that according to CTP statistics on Service leavers, almost three-quarters of military Service people over 50 are planning to leave at or before the end of their current posting.[9] Two in five military staff have actively searched for a job in the past twelve months (MOD, 2018b, p11) and many need support in transitioning to a new career.

While most Service leavers are able to transition smoothly to civilian work, a significant proportion face barriers in finding work which makes good use of their skills, experience and knowledge (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Iversen et al., 2005). Unemployment amongst former Service people generally, at around 11%[10], is double that of the population as a whole (Royal British Legion, 2014). According to the Royal British Legion, twice as many of those who are out of work are either no longer looking for work, have taken early retirement, or have returned to education than are actively seeking employment. Further, former military personnel are less likely than the general population to be in full-time employment (Pike, 2016). Jobless 50+ Service leavers generally are out of work longer than their younger contemporaries due to ageism, poor social networks, difficulties in navigating the job market and difficulties in finding work which is equivalent to what they had done previously (Bauknecht & Cebulla, 2016).

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8   Voluntary outflow is defined as resigning before their agreed engagement period (other ranks) or commission (officers) ends.

9   Figures from AFCAS 2018.

10   Figure from CTP Annual Statistics.

**TWO-THIRDS OF PEOPLE WHO LEAVE THE ARMED FORCES DO SO THROUGH 'VOLUNTARY OUTFLOW'**

EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF OLDER FORMER SERVICE PEOPLE

The literature on intersectionality suggests that interlocking forms of marginalisation play out to create unique experiences of disadvantage (Hancock, 2007). 50+ Service leavers face barriers to work because of both their age and past military service. Although their experiences may have similarities with those of older people generally or Service leavers of all ages, their place in the labour market is influenced by overlapping experiences of discrimination. In this section, we discuss literature on older job seekers and military Service leavers. Figure 1 shows how age and military service may intersect to impact on the experiences of older Service leavers.

Older Service leavers enter a labour market in which older job seekers are disadvantaged due to implicit and explicit forms of ageism (Taylor, 2011). While the UK has legislated against most forms of age discrimination, in reality, this has not eradicated direct and indirect age discrimination. Older people looking for work are suspicious that they may find age a barrier (TAEN, 2013). Surveys show that age discrimination is widely experienced by both younger and older workers (Musaddique, 2017) although ageism unfolds differently for the two groups. Employers perceive young people as lacking social skills, experience and loyalty to the organisation whereas older workers are perceived as having skills which are out of date, in poor health and being resistant to change (Snape & Redman, 2003). While employers tend to report positive views about their own 50+ workers, their perceptions of older workers generally are influenced by age-based assumptions such as older people being in chronic poor health or resistant to change (Nelson, 2016). Accordingly, many older workers who may want to change their career may fail to do so because they worry about being able to find a new job at an equivalent salary and status level (Lassus, Lopez, & Roscigno, 2015).

FIGURE 1:

THE INTERSECTION OF AGE AND MILITARY STATUS

SERVICE LEAVERS

PRINCIPLED

HAVING ANALYTICAL SKILLS

GOOD UNDER PRESSURE

REGIMENTED

LACKING 'THE RIGHT' EXPERIENCE

EXPERIENCING PTSD

BEING 'MAD, BAD AND SAD'

50+ SERVICE LEAVERS

LEADERSHIP

CRITICAL THINKING

MILITARY ACQUIRED SKILLS

BRINGING A NEW PERSPECTIVE

OUT OF PLACE IN CIVILIAN WORKPLACES

50+ JOBSEEKERS

LOYAL

EXPERIENCED

OVERPAID

STABLE/SET IN WAYS

OUTDATED SKILLS

WAITING TO RETIRE

HAVING HEALTH ISSUES

EXPERIENCING AGEISM

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Employers have mixed perceptions of military people, some of which may in turn shape decisions on whether or not to hire former Service people. Negative views include presumptions of mental health problems, poor skills, being too inflexible and too regimented for civilian work (Davis & Minnis, 2017). The British Legion has characterised some employers' perceptions of former Service people as 'mad, bad and sad' (Pike, 2016: 17). Discrimination against Service leavers can also intersect with gender, race and disability to amplify perceptions from employers (Greer, 2017; Jones & Hanley, 2017).

Employers' perceptions in many respects do not match reality regarding the health of former Service people. Former Service people between the ages of 50 and 64 are only marginally more likely to have at least one long term health condition than older workers in the general population (47% versus 43%) (MOD, 2016). In most cases, older workers are able to stay employed and productive in work with relatively modest accommodations from their employers (McNair & Flynn, 2012). Medical discharge amongst older military personnel varies between the Armed Forces, although across the military, it is less frequent for officers than other Service personnel. The number of medical-related discharges has risen over the past five years, which the MOD attributes to awareness-raising campaigns to encourage Service people to seek support within their regiments for managing health conditions (MOD, 2018a).

Businesses generally have positive views of former Service people and value the skills they have acquired through military service (BIS, 2012b). Employers perceive former Service people as honest, diligent in their work, motivated by doing good for their team members, showing leadership skills, and being dependable (Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Fisher, & Stewart, 2014; Kleykamp, 2009). Such characteristics are

FIGURE 2:

MEDICAL DISCHARGES IN BRANCHES OF ARMED SERVICES
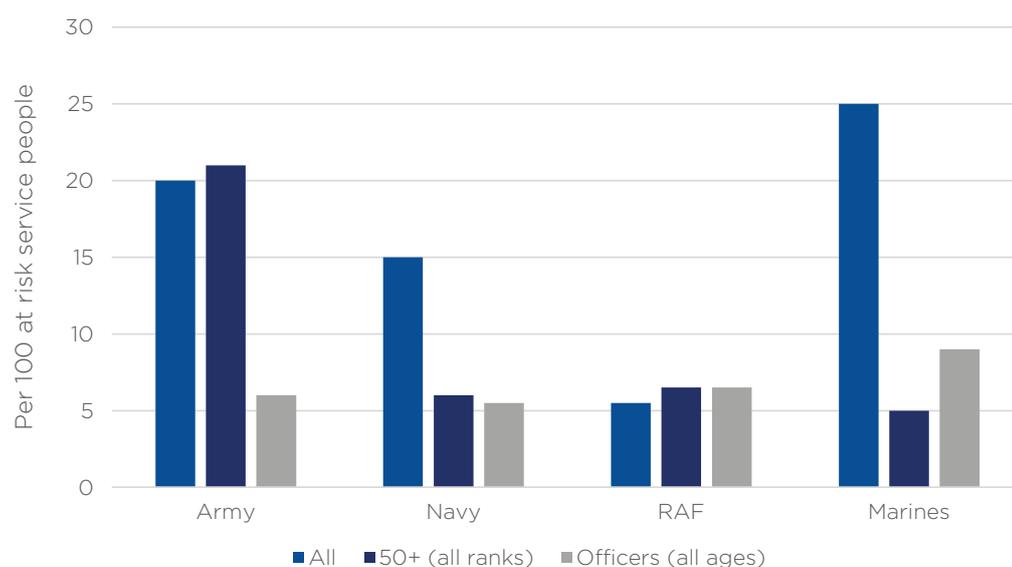
ANNUAL MEDICAL DISCHARGES IN THE UK REGULAR ARMED FORCES: 1 APRIL 2013 TO 31 MARCH 2018

similar to characteristics employers attribute to older workers like loyalty, conscientiousness and having good management skills (DWP, 2001). Employers might also be incentivised to recruit Service leavers by perceptions of a 'good soldier syndrome' (Rose, Herd, & Palacio, 2017). Military service and training instil values like a sense of duty and loyalty and this may lead to assumptions that former Service people are more willing than other employees to work beyond what is required for the job without an expectation of being rewarded for doing so. Such perceptions can help former Service people in finding work, but they can also lead to unrealistic expectations by their employers of the effort and commitment they will devote to the job (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009).

Similarly, employers' expectations of what kind of jobs older job seekers want can have a significant impact on their employment prospects. Expectations do not always match reality. For example, older job seekers are often assumed to be 'winding down' towards retirement. However, this assumption is belied by the fact that more than half of people over 50 hope to continue working beyond the state pension age (Maitland, 2010). In fact, one in ten people over 50 are dissatisfied because they want promotion and greater responsibility, while only 4% say they would like to downshift to a more junior job. Researchers have looked at both explicit (self-reported) and implicit (inferred) measures of attitude and found evidence of unconscious bias against older workers (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). Recognising and neutralising such biases has become a common aim for HR managers and equalities specialists.

FORMER SERVICE PEOPLE'S DIFFICULTIES TRANSFERRING SKILLS TO CIVILIAN WORK

One of the most significant barriers which older workers face in securing work is the lack of skills which are specified as essential to the job for which they are applying (Kintzle et al., 2015). Opportunities are limited to retrain for skills which can help in the pursuit of new careers or trades in later life. Some individuals may have sufficient skills to perform a job but lack the necessary paper qualifications. Others may have most of the skills needed while being short in some respects.

Building on the skills older people have already gained in earlier employment could be a way to develop a skilled worker. However, the likelihood of participation in training declines with age, most strongly after the age of 60 (Urwin, 2004). Not only are employers less likely to offer training to older workers than younger ones, but older workers themselves are more reluctant to ask for training. McNair (2010: 37) has described this as a 'collusion against training' for older workers. Older workers avoid asking for training because they do not want to signal to the employer that they lack the right skills for the job and employers do not consider offering training because they assume that older workers are uninterested in acquiring new skills and qualifications.

The difficulty of mobilising acquired skills toward the pursuit of a new career is a significant challenge for former Service people due to the uniqueness of skills which are acquired and used in the military. Research for the Officers Association has suggested that ex-service job-seekers found that unsuccessful job seekers are frequently told that a reason for not being hired is a lack of experience in the industry in which they want to work (CIE Chime, 2018). Job specifications may often be written in ways that exclude job seekers from outside the sector, especially in organisations without human resource specialists who may be able to identify and address implicit biases (Davis & Minnis, 2017). Although British employers identify skills shortages as amongst their most significant business concerns (Wallace & Tovey, 2017), they nevertheless tend to recruit from restricted labour pools (Broughton, Keohane, & Ketola, 2016). Because civilian employers generally struggle in matching Service leavers' skills to the needs of the organisation, many former Service people focus job searches on private-sector defence contractors which come closest to the skills sets needed in the military (CIE Chime, 2018).

Skills levels vary across the military and, of course, differ by rank. Many military personnel have low or no qualifications which can be applied to finding sustainable work outside of the military. Skills levels of Armed Forces recruits vary widely - 50% of Army recruits have less than a Level 1 qualification - although, for other divisions, the skills level is much higher. The RAF, in particular, looks for recruits who have technical and engineering expertise (BIS, 2012a). Although many military recruits start off with few qualifications, they usually acquire skills and training during their service and officers, in particular, acquire leadership skills. After joining the Armed Forces, a Service person will receive basic training based on the Common Military Syllabus followed by specialist training from a specialist school run by a training corps which is operated within one of the Armed Forces branches. These schools include, for example, the Royal School of Military Engineering (run by the Army); Defence College of Healthcare Education and Training; and Royal Military Academy Sandhurst which provides leadership training for officers in the Army.[11] Military colleges and training centres provide training throughout a Service person's career while in the Armed Forces.

Although Service leavers have a variety of management and technical skills, not all skills are easily transferable to civilian work (Kleykamp, 2009). Traditional military experience like combat is seldom transferable. Even specialised skills that are in high demand, like those in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) which are acquired in the military may not be recognised by employers seeking talent (Hardison et al., 2015b). Soft skills like leadership, team working and reliability can, however, make former Service job applicants attractive to employers (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper, & Fossey, 2016). Even though the military may offer comprehensive training in a variety of specialisms, civilian employers often do not recognise certification of those skills making it difficult for Service leavers to demonstrate the transferability of their skills (Stone & Stone, 2015).

Older Service leavers' experience in the labour market may be influenced by the intersection of age with military Service. Training which has been acquired through military service may not be obviously transferable to civilian work. This then puts older Service people at a disadvantage in the labour market even if they have skills which employers say that they need. Some training could help older former Service people in applying skills which they have acquired while in the Services to civilian work which they value.

TRANSITIONING TO A NEW CAREER

Transitioning to a new career in middle age can be problematic, even though a large part of the vocational training sector is devoted to supporting mid-career changes. Newspaper advice columns, websites and popular journal articles abound in providing advice to the mid-life career changer. People make mid-career job changes for a variety of reasons. Some feel forced to make a career change because they no longer feel needed in their workplaces and want to bow out gracefully rather than be pushed out of a job. Others may want to take on a new challenge or want a change in lifestyle such as a reduction in working hours (Thomas, 1980). Key elements for successful career changes in midlife include good careers counselling, objective support in assessing skills, structured planning to achieve change, access to training and guidance to help with particular problems (for example on finance, housing or family matters). Preparation by the individual is seen as a vital element in a successful transition, not just in the weeks and months before leaving but over the long term. (Ashcroft, 2014).

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11   For a full list of military schools and colleges, see: https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/our-schools-and-colleges/ (Army); https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/bases-and-stations/training-establishments (Royal Navy); https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/training-and-development (Royal Air Force)

CONTINUED MILITARY IDENTITY

For some Service leavers, transitioning from military service is impaired by identity challenges which play out in three ways:

1) personal identity which is shaped by military life and values (Grimell, 2015);

2) social networks built within and not outside the Armed Forces (Hart & Lancaster, 2017); and

3) difficulties in adapting to new environments (Semaan, Britton, & Dosono, 2016).

Many aspects of military identity, such as a sense of duty, can be positive for prospective employers. However, continued military identity can reinforce employers' biases against military staff and lead to assumptions that ex-Service employees would be unable to adapt to new work environments. Although Service leavers of all ages experience a sense of continued military identity, for older Service leavers, the sense of losing that identity once their long service in the Armed Forces comes to an end can have an impact on their career choices in the civilian world. Older workers who experience a redundancy after long service often seek reemployment through bridge employment in order to maintain a sense of community with their previous occupational communities (MacKenzie & Marks, 2019).

LACK OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Employability skills (i.e. those which are deployed to navigate the labour market and find work of value) have been identified as a particular challenge for former Service people (Pike, 2016). Securing employment in the civilian labour market is very different from managing one's career in military service (Black & Hertig, 2015). Whereas military progression is based on a formal framework of training and qualifications attainment, finding a job on the open market can feel to many older job seekers to be uncertain, risky and difficult to navigate. Former Service people, especially those with long service, may, therefore, lack the skills sets such as social networking, interviewing and CV writing to secure work, although career service providers like CTP offer 'soft skills' training to help former Service people navigate the civilian labour market.
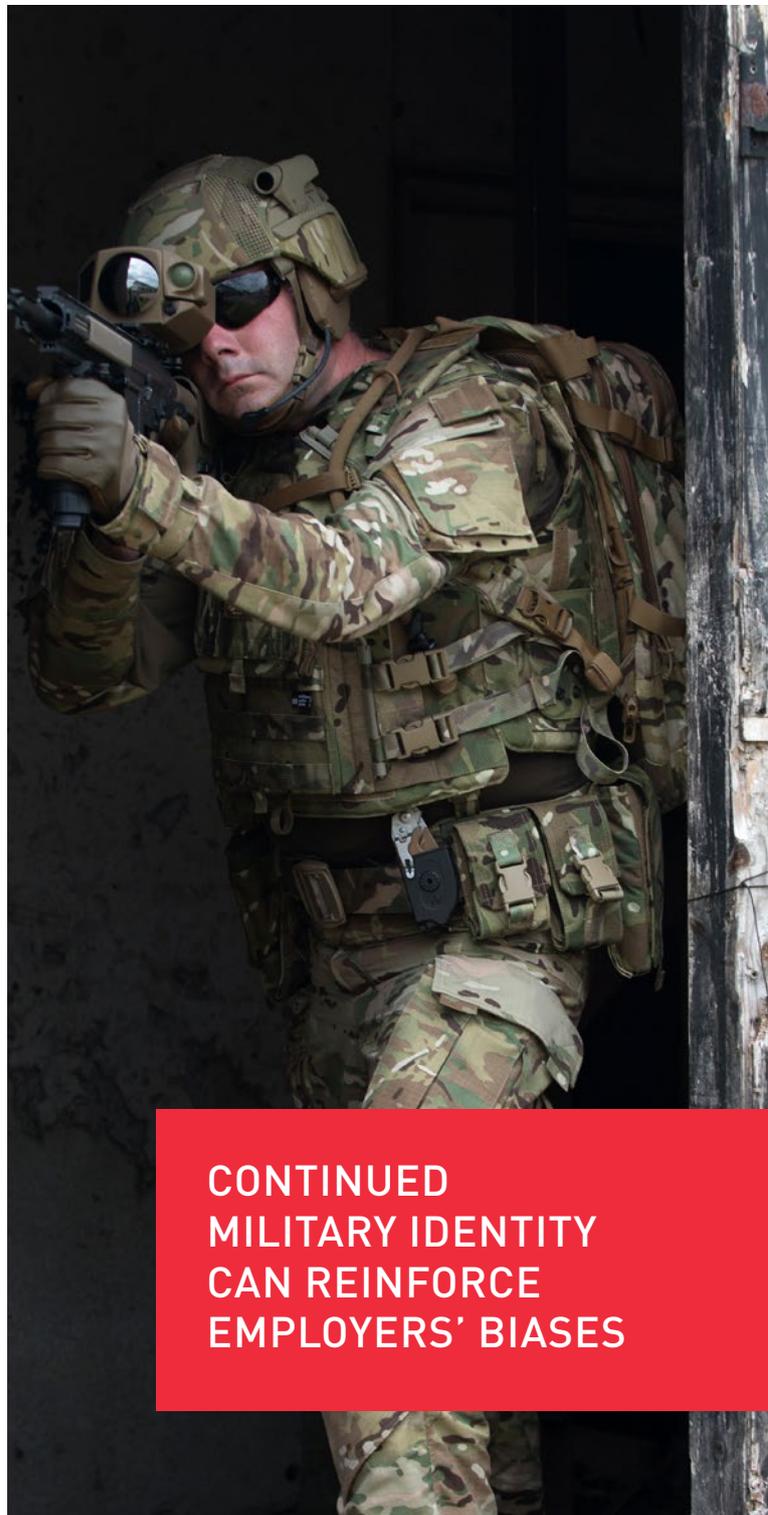
CONTINUED MILITARY IDENTITY CAN REINFORCE EMPLOYERS' BIASES

PROPOSED GOOD PRACTICE

MAPPING OF MILITARY AND CIVILIAN KEY SKILLS

Given the challenges of translating military skills into commodified assets for former Service people in the civil labour market, there has been considerable research focused on matching training, qualifications and tacit knowledge in the Armed Forces with competencies which civilian employers require. The Rand Corporation (Hardison et al., 2015a), for example, identified nineteen core competencies which employers in a range of industries cited as 'essential' in selection criteria. Such competencies are grouped into three categories:

1) interactions within a work environment (team working, leadership, training others);

2) managing oneself (dependability, adaptability, behaving ethically) and

3) managing work (e.g. situational awareness, decision-making, project planning).

All of these skills are used within the military but in ways which differ from civilian workplaces. For example, critical thinking and the ability to make fast decisions with limited information are manifestly important skills to have within combat, but are also central to managing finance, projects and teams.

Using principles of human resource development, employers seeking to recruit former Service people can map their skills against job requirements (Davis & Minnis, 2017). This exercise has already been used by businesses to address other implicit biases on the basis of, for example, gender, race and age (Williams & Mavin, 2014). Keys to the process entail avoiding restrictive definitions of job requirements (e.g. looking for 'managerial experience' rather than 'retail managerial experience'); avoiding proxies for competencies (e.g. basing job specifications on a pre-requisite number of years' experience); and transparency for the job applicant to enable them to discuss how their skills match the requirements of the job.

MENTORING

Some employers like Amazon, General Electric (GE) and Sodexo are offering mentors to former Service job seekers and on appointment as employees. This helps them adapt to new work environments (Institute for Veterans and Families, 2012). Sodexo, for example, deploys peer-to-peer mentors to support ex-Service recruits to live and work in new environments and deal with issues which are common in the assimilation process. A particular focus is on career progression with the mentor supporting the mentee into work which matches their experience and skills.

In GE, mentors also reverse mentor managers in making the best use of ex-Service talent. Such interventions include addressing biases affecting recruitment and career development decision-making. Inclusive approaches to workforce management are adopted. Similar principles have also been used to support other groups like women leaders into professional roles. Some organisations have also developed employee networks to advise their HRM directors in developing and embedding inclusive approaches to managing former Service people.

MID-LIFE CAREER COUNSELLING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Career counselling at or around the age of 50 has been positioned as an intervention which can help older workers in transitioning to work which both makes good use of the skills which they have built up and suits their changing life circumstances (Rauvola, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019). Mid-life career services can support not only unemployed people, but also those who are in work but may be thinking about a career change. A study by the Eurofound (Jungblut, 2016) considered the part played by mid-career reviews and vocational counselling in the promotion of job mobility in later life. A pilot study funded by the UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills in 2014 examined different approaches to older workers' career services with the explicit aim of enabling people to make changes to support the extension of their working lives (TUC, 2014). Interventions like career counselling can be *"important preventative measures in helping mid-life and older workers remain in the labour market by supporting them to update their skills in their current workplace or to make a career change"* (p6).

Career counselling is equally important for Service people of all ages given that most will at some point transition to civilian work at some point in their careers. A 2014 comprehensive review of Service leaver transitions highlighted the importance of Service people maintaining a personal development plan (PDP) which catalogues the training, skills and experience which are acquired throughout active service. Crucially, it was recommended that Service people not only maintain PDPs but also that they are monitored by their commanding officers.

"Personnel [sh]ould be monitored by their commanders in completing the PDP, which will inculcate a sense of responsibility for personal development and ultimately make for a smoother and more successful transition." (Ashcroft, 2014: 15)

Ensuring that PDPs are kept current is particularly important for long-serving Service people who may not be thinking about a transition out of the Armed Forces during most of their careers.

MID-CAREER APPRENTICESHIPS

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in 2017 and requires employers with payrolls over £3 million to contribute to an apprenticeship fund. The fund can then be used to pay for employer training. Employers are looking for ways to use acquired funds to train and develop new recruits. Although most apprenticeships are targeted at young people, some employers are offering opportunities to experienced workers who are seeking a transition to a new line of work. In 2015, Barclays Bank opened its apprenticeship programme to people over 24 years of age. What became known as Barclays Bolder Apprenticeship programme, was thus not exclusively intended for middle-aged people but attracted much media attention for its ground-breaking idea that people over 50 could learn a new trade or skill. In 2015, 43 apprentices were enrolled in the Bolder Apprenticeship programme, one-third of whom were over the age of 50 (Handley, 2015). A number of variations on apprenticeships and traineeships are offered by Barclays in addition to their Bolder Apprenticeships, giving people who have been outside the workforce for various reasons, opportunities to return.

PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT SERVICE LEAVERS INTO EMPLOYMENT

Resettlement support is currently delivered in a comprehensive package of structured programmes, principally through the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) which provides services to all three of the armed services from local to national level. Two initiatives have been developed by the MOD working with employers - both are focused on supporting former Service people into sustainable work.

First, the Armed Forces Covenant is a voluntary network of businesses, government and third sector organisations to facilitate resettlement. Amongst its programmes, is a scheme to recognise good employer practice and innovative approaches to employing former Service people. Advice, support and toolkits are provided to assist employers.Over four thousand companies are signatories to the covenant across all occupational sectors. About one-third of the AFC signatories are large employers (500+ employees). Although member organisations are committed to addressing disadvantages faced by former Service people in the labour market generally, the scheme also recognises that certain groups of transitioning Service personnel may face unique challenges in finding work. It acknowledges that they may need bespoke approaches to resettlement including retraining, mentoring and reasonable accommodations from employers, for example in the design of the job and work environment (AFC, 2018). Second, the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) has been developed to acknowledge and showcase exceptional employment practices to support former Service people. ERS focuses on initiatives concerning recruitment, skills, leave and family support.

OVER FOUR THOUSAND COMPANIES ARE SIGNATORIES TO THE COVENANT ACROSS ALL OCCUPATIONAL SECTORS

WORK CLUBS

Work clubs provide a forum where job seekers can meet, gain support, exchange ideas and discover opportunities. Some job clubs are supported by churches or religious organisations such as Christians Against Poverty. The Department for Work and Pensions (2012) issued guidance on setting up work clubs. Some charities and housing associations have job clubs or work clubs. In some cases, these may also offer training schemes to help clients acquire new skills. Some job clubs support a specialist segment of the workforce, for example, professional and executive staff. Former Service people's job clubs are supported in the UK by the RFEA, the Forces Employment Charity or CTP but are far more common in the USA. Work clubs can help in engaging with employers. In two pilot Workability Clubs for older job seekers in the charity Shaw Trust, employer engagement and mutual support were offered to long term job seekers over the age of 50.

CONCLUSION

While there are many studies on the experiences of older workers and of military leavers, there remains a lack of understanding of how age and military service intersect in terms of impacting on employability. There is a large overlap between these two. For both older job seekers and former Service people, the challenge of finding work which makes use of their skills, experience and qualifications are often significant. Many older workers and Service leavers find themselves unemployed, underemployed or economically inactive (Royal British Legion, 2014). Both groups face employers who have preconceived assumptions about their capabilities and how well they will fit into new workplaces. Securing high-value work for both groups depends on having good employability skills, being able to transfer skills to another industry, and having access to training in order to address skills deficits. Ways in which 50+ Service leavers could be helped in securing employment include career advice, apprenticeships and mentoring for job seekers and improving approaches to seeking and assessing talent for employers.

While there is considerable overlap of the literature on older job seekers and Service leavers, neither of these bodies of research can fully explain the experience of 50+ Service leavers in seeking civilian work. First, the experience of 50+ Service leavers may be different from that of both younger Service leavers and civilian job seekers. Employers may, for example, think differently about how they apply the experience of long military service to jobs in their workplaces than they do about utilising the military service of people in their twenties and thirties. Second, it is important to recognise the diversity within the group of 50+ Service leavers. For example, the experiences of officers are likely to be very different from senior ranks because of their qualifications and unique skills sets in relation to leadership. Again, among officers of 50+, there are many differences both in terms of skill-sets and levels of rank attained, all of which may have a profound impact on the ease with which civilian employment can be found. And the experiences of 50+ Service leavers of all ranks may well differ according to the service and branch of service in which they served. Accordingly, the next stage of this research is to gather primary qualitative and quantitative data through focus groups and surveys with employers, 50+ Service leavers and 50+ Service personnel who are currently transitioning out of the military.

SECONDARY ANALYSIS

This section focuses on mid-life career changes and the experiences of 50+ Service people compared to civilians of the same age.

The experiences of older workers have been the subject of much attention from businesses, the government and others with an interest in improving the way the job market works for those making job transitions after the age of 50 (see, for example, the European Commission report on mid-life career reviews (Jungblut, 2016)). Much of the focus has been on how older people make a job change (e.g. whether it is through choice or enforced by redundancy or a health problem) (Ebbinghaus & Radl, 2015). Other academics have investigated the reasons why older people decide to make a career move (Kooij, Tims, & Kanfer, 2015), and the destinations of older job seekers once they have made a job change (DWP, 2015). One of the objectives of the present project is to explore whether and how the experiences of Service people who transition to civilian work after the age of 50 differ from older job seekers generally. In this section, we draw on survey data to consider the experiences of older Service leavers and the general population in making career transitions after the age of 50.

Comparison is made using four datasets: two of which are carried out with military personnel and two with the general population. We are using data from the UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) (2018). AFCAS is an annual survey carried out by the Ministry of Defence. This sample was drawn from September 2017 to February 2018 surveying 27,333 UK Regular Armed Forces personnel. Following a Freedom of Information request, we were able to draw data relating to respondents aged 50 and over which was much smaller with 753 respondents. Secondly, we have drawn on the Career Transition Partnership Annual Statistics (CTPAS) from March 2017. 64,162 Service leavers were surveyed about their transition outcomes.

For comparison with the MOD dataset, we have used two nationally representative datasets, the English Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA) (covering England only) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which covers the whole of the UK. ELSA is a biannual longitudinal survey, currently in its eighteenth year, of a representative sample of people in England 50 and over. It covers themes including health, well-being, economic position and cognition. We use ELSA data collected between June 2014 and May 2015 containing responses from 9,670 responses in total. The LFS is the largest regular social survey in the UK with around 38,000 households included and concerns employment circumstances. We use the five-quarter longitudinal LFS dataset April 2017 to June 2018. Details of the methodologies of the four surveys can be found using the links below.[12] Finally, we are using findings from a 2004 study on mid-career job transitions carried out by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW). The study was derived from a survey of 3003 people 50 and over on their last job change (McNair et al., 2004).

It is important to note that comparisons between the four datasets are limited by two factors which we discuss in the conclusion. The first of these is that questions are not asked in exactly the same way in the different surveys. Second, while we have access to the full datasets for ELSA and LFS, we only have access to descriptive statistics from AFCAS and CTP. This limited our analysis in terms of being able to focus on the experiences of specific groups of older former Service people such as people who transitioned from different military ranks. As part of the project, we have conducted surveys of current and former service people over the age of 50, and at the end of this section, we will briefly discuss how the secondary analysis informed the design of questionnaires for surveys of current and former Service people which are part of our fieldwork.

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12 AFCAS: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/armed-forces-continuous-attitude-survey-2018

CTPAS: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/career-transition-partnership-ex-service-personnel-employment-outcomes-statistics-index

ELSA: https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/

LFS: https://www.ons.gov.uk/surveys/informationforhouseholdsandindividuals/householdandindividualsurveys/labourforcesurvey

TABLE 2:

SUMMARY OF STUDIES USED

STUDY	TARGET POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	WAVE	SURVEY QUESTIONS
AFCAS	UK Regular Armed Forces personnel	27333	2017/18	What are your plans for the future?
				How actively have you searched for a job outside the [service] in the last 12 months?
				In the last year, have you been approached by industry with offers of employment?
				How do the following factors impact on your intention to stay or leave the [Service]?
CTPAS	CTP Service Users	64,162	2017	Employment outcomes of UK Regular Service Personnel
				Reasons for economic inactivity among UK Regular Service Personnel
LFS	UK households	38,000	2017/18	What was the main reason why you were not in paid employment or self-employed at that time?
				Were you looking for a different or additional paid job or business in the week ending Sunday the [date]?
				Why were you looking for another job?
ELSA	50+ English population	9670	2017/18	We would like to know how strongly you think these apply to the paid employment you did in the last month.
CROW	50+ UK population	3003	2003/04	Thinking about the most recent change to your job or working status, and using this card as a guide, what was/were the/your main reason(s) for making your last job change?

INTENTION TO CHANGE JOBS

Most people change jobs and even employers throughout their careers. As people age, the frequency of job change declines (McNair et al., 2004). This decline in job mobility may be because young workers, still looking for their niche in life, typically try a range of different jobs in different industries, while older workers (having found the kind of work which suits their interests, lifestyles and capabilities) do not have the same desire to try new roles. However, many older workers are minded to make job changes, especially when the work which they are doing no longer fits their circumstances. For example, they may be no longer physically capable of undertaking certain tasks. Nevertheless, they may be hesitant to embark on a change at a late stage in their lives (McNair, 2006). Older job seekers remain unemployed longer than younger workers and when they return to work, it is often to a role which is lower-paid and requires fewer skills than their previous job (Virick, 2011).

Expectations of leaving the military are high amongst older Service people. According to AFCAS data, 68% of military people aged 50+ report an intention to leave military service at or before the end of their current assignment with 27% wanting to continue to serve as long as they can. Younger Service people are only somewhat more likely to want to serve as long as they can (30%) but are more likely to be uncertain of their future plans (17% versus 4%). Amongst older Service people, intention to serve as long as possible is highest among the Royal Marines (41%) and lowest in the RAF (23%).

TABLE 3:

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

RESPONSES	AGED 50 AND OVER (%)	AGED UNDER 50 (%)
To stay serving as long as I can	27	30
To stay serving to the end of current engagement/commission	47	26
To leave the [Service] before the end of my current engagement/commission	16	14
To leave the [Service] as soon as I can	2	8
I have put in my notice to leave	3	4
Don't know	4	17

SOURCE: AFCAS
50+: N=753; UNDER 50: N=9,720

Most older Service people report active planning for leaving military service and transitioning to civilian work. 42% of older current Service people say they are actively seeking work. This represents a little under two-thirds of those who report plans to leave the military at or before the end of their current postings. 53% of older Service leavers in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines (both those who actively planning a job transition and those who are not doing so) report that they have been approached by civilian organisations about employment.[13]

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13   This question was not asked of people in the Army or RAF.

FIGURE 3:

HOW ACTIVELY HAVE YOU SEARCHED FOR A JOB OUTSIDE THE [SERVICE] IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS?
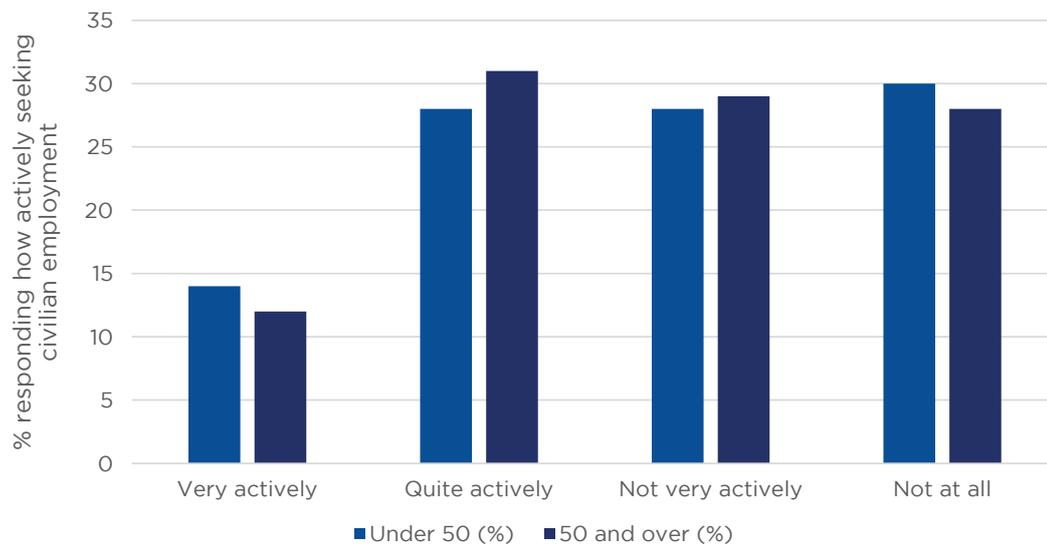
SOURCE: AFCAS

50+: N=753; UNDER 50: N=9,720

According to LFS, 2.3% of civilians between 50 and 65 are unemployed and 2.5% of people in this age group report having actively sought paid work over the past four weeks.[14] LFS asks respondents who are in work whether they are looking for other employment and why they are doing so. Figures are small (only 28 workers 50-65 responded) most likely owing to the phrasing of the question (only workers who are currently job seeking were asked to reply) and the fact that many people who are in work may be reluctant to say that they are seeking employment elsewhere because they would prefer not to let their employer know until a job has been landed. The most common reasons for late-career job changes were because the present job is coming to an end, a desire for a change in working hours, or unsatisfactory job conditions (22% each).

Although the data is a decade and a half old, a 2004 report (McNair et al., 2004) on late-career job transitions in the UK provides a more complete picture of how and why older people leave one job for another. The report is based on a survey executed through questions added to the UK Omnibus Survey (2003). The questions asked respondents whether they had made a job transition over the previous five years and their reasons for doing so. 68% of people currently in work and aged 55 to 65 reported making a job change in the previous five years.[15] The most common job change was retirement from their main job and transition to a less demanding one (25%), a change of employer (20%) and a change of job within the same employer (13%). Reasons cited were then clustered into common themes. Younger people reported changing jobs for career-related or because their new posts offered more money than their previous jobs. By contrast, older job changers moved in order to reduce work pressures or for personal reasons, such as having moved home or wanting to reduce travel time.

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14   Some people who report being inactive also report that they had sought paid work over the period.

15   We are excluding respondents 50-54 since some could have made a job transition before the age of 50.

FIGURE 4:
REASONS FOR LAST JOB TRANSITION
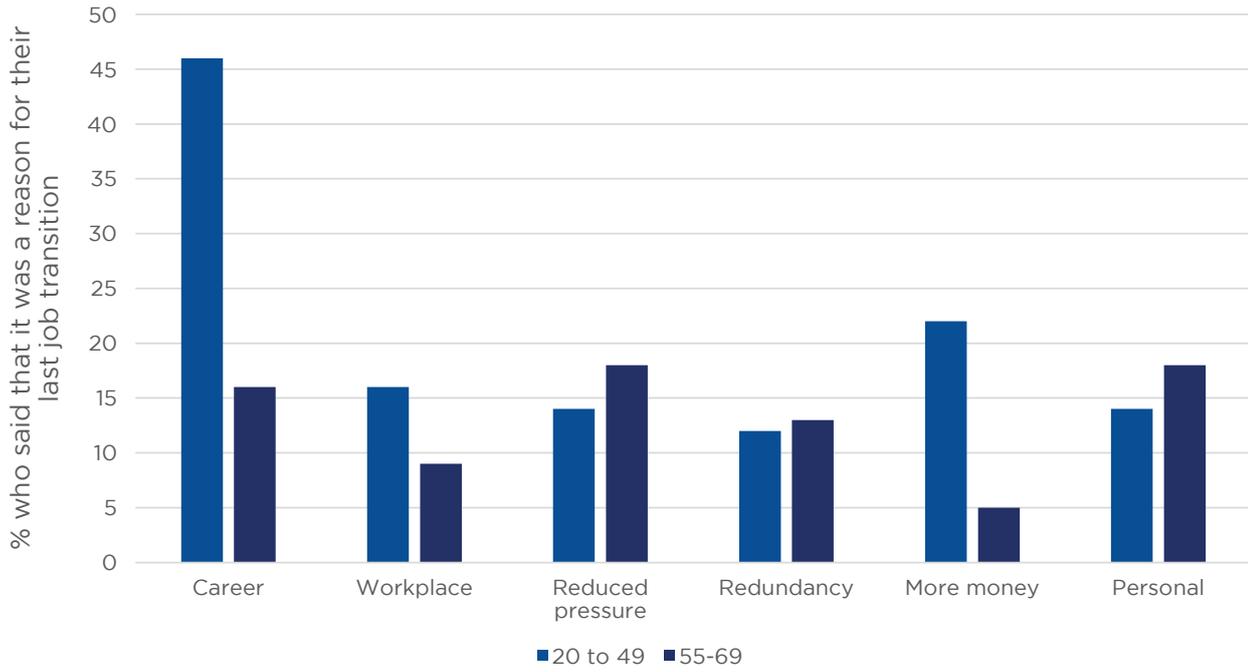
SOURCE: MCNAIR ET AL, 2004
20 TO 49 N=1499; 55-65 N=143

Transitions out of the military are shaped by factors such as career progression routes and access to pensions (which we discuss in the next section), so it is important to note that the frequency of job transitions after the age of 50 are similar for Service leavers and civilian older workers. Once they leave the Armed Forces, many 50+ Service leavers will make subsequent job transitions for career or personal reasons.

VIEWS ON WORK WHICH IMPACT ON INTENTION TO LEAVE THE MILITARY

Intention to enter the job market is strongly influenced by satisfaction with one's current job. AFCAS provides useful data to show how this balance plays out by asking Service people about 28 different aspects of military service and whether these factors influence them to be more likely to be inclined to stay or leave military service. Table 4 shows the top ten workplace factors which older Service people cited as increasing their intentions to leave military service. The views of older Service people are only moderately different from those of their younger colleagues.[16] Eight of the factors were amongst the top ten factors for both groups.

The only two factors which older Service people frequently cited but younger Service people did not were promotion prospects and financial incentives. In the tables below, factors which were cited by both older and younger Service people are italicised.

A similar pattern is shown in relation to factors which are most frequently cited as increasing Service people's intention to remain in military service. Seven out of ten factors are cited by both older and younger Service people. The three factors which are most frequently cited only by older Service people are 'current job satisfaction', 'my morale', and pay.

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16 It is important to note that there are differences in strengths of causality between dissatisfaction with Service and intention to leave due to a large proportion of 50+ Service leavers transition out of the Armed Forces simply because they have reached retirement age. We are referring here to the ranking of reasons for leaving.

TABLE 4:

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO STATED FACTORS INCREASE THEIR INTENTIONS TO LEAVE IN MILITARY SERVICE

50 AND OVER		UNDER 50	
WORKPLACE FACTORS	%	WORKPLACE FACTORS	%
Impact of (service) life on family and personal life)	55	Impact of (service) life on family and personal life)	64
Opportunities outside the (service)	54	Opportunities outside the (service)	56
Spouse/partner's career	45	Work-life balance at sea	55
Service morale	40	Childcare	52
My morale	36	Spouse/partner's career	51
Promotion prospects	33	Service morale	49
Amount of pay	31	Amount of pay	45
Work-life balance on shore	30	My morale	44
Amount of allowances	28	Work-life balance on shore	41
Current job satisfaction	27	Current job satisfaction	41

SOURCE: AFCAS

50 AND OVER: N= 734; UNDER 50: N=9752 (MAX)

TABLE 5:

PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAY FACTORS INCREASE THEIR INTENTIONS TO STAY IN MILITARY SERVICE

50 AND OVER		UNDER 50	
WORKPLACE FACTORS	%	WORKPLACE FACTORS	%
Job security	62	Job security	70
Dental provision	59	Dental provision	69
Healthcare	58	Healthcare	67
Pension	57	Pension	47
Excitement for the job	52	Opportunities for sport	47
Current job satisfaction	46	Opportunities for adventure training	47
My morale	41	Mental health provision	47
Opportunities for sport	37	Financial incentives	47
Amount of pay	36	Opportunities for personal development	43
Financial incentives	35	Excitement for the job	42

SOURCE: AFCAS

50 AND OVER: N= 734; UNDER 50: N=9752 (MAX)

As with older workers generally, older Service people cite personal factors such as the impact of work on the family or spouse, as being amongst the top reasons for making a job transition. Many also leave military service because they want better work-life balance, morale and job satisfaction. However, unlike the older workforce generally, many also consider a job transition for career-related reasons like wanting a new work opportunity outside of the military service, a promotion or a better-paid job. Factors which deter them from leaving the Armed Services are the stability of pay and benefits like healthcare, pensions and levels of pay and job security. While many older Service people consider leaving due to dissatisfaction with their work or morale, many others stay because they are happy with their work or they see new opportunities for exciting challenges in military service.

ELSA provides data which shows how older workers generally perceive the factors which make up their jobs, adopting a work satisfaction scale of twelve aspects of work. Like Service people, older workers generally rank higher, those factors which contribute to their having secure work, although this is articulated as freedom and control over work as well as avoidance of work which is too physically demanding. However, like older Service people, they are less satisfied than younger workers are with promotion prospects and the lack of recognition of the value of their work. Older workers are slightly more likely than older Service people to express dissatisfaction with their pay and job security, reflecting the highly segmented nature of the workforce outside the Armed Forces.

TABLE 6:
WORK SATISFACTION SCALE

DOES YOUR WORK PROVIDE:	% RESPONDING POSITIVELY
Freedom in carrying out their work	60
Not too physically demanding	56
Job satisfaction	53
Control over work	52
Support in difficult situations	48
Opportunity to learn new skills	45
Adequate salary	45
Good job security	45
No constant work pressure	39
Is recognised for work they do	38
Do not need to work fast	30
Good promotion prospects	28

SOURCE: ELSA

55 TO 65-YEAR-OLD RESPONDENTS: N=145

By merging the two surveys together (i.e. comparing dissatisfaction in ELSA with 'increases intention to leave' in AFCAS), we can compare the workplace factors which impact on older Service people's interest to make a job transition.[17] Older Service people are less dissatisfied with the work than their civilian counterparts especially regarding job security and opportunities for personal development. However, many are transitioning into civilian work in order to pursue new opportunities for more rewarding work both in terms of intrinsic benefits like recognition from their employers and extrinsic benefits like pay.

OLDER SERVICE PEOPLE CITE PERSONAL FACTORS AS BEING AMONGST THE TOP REASONS FOR MAKING A JOB TRANSITION

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17   AFCAS figures only measure responses of "Increases my intention to leave" (one of three options) whereas ELSA figures are conflated dissatisfied/very dissatisfied. Therefore, the fact that ELSA figures seem to consistently be higher than AFCAS ones is a reflection of how questions were phrased.

FIGURE 5:

INTENTION TO LEAVE AND DISSATISFACTION WITH ASPECTS OF WORK
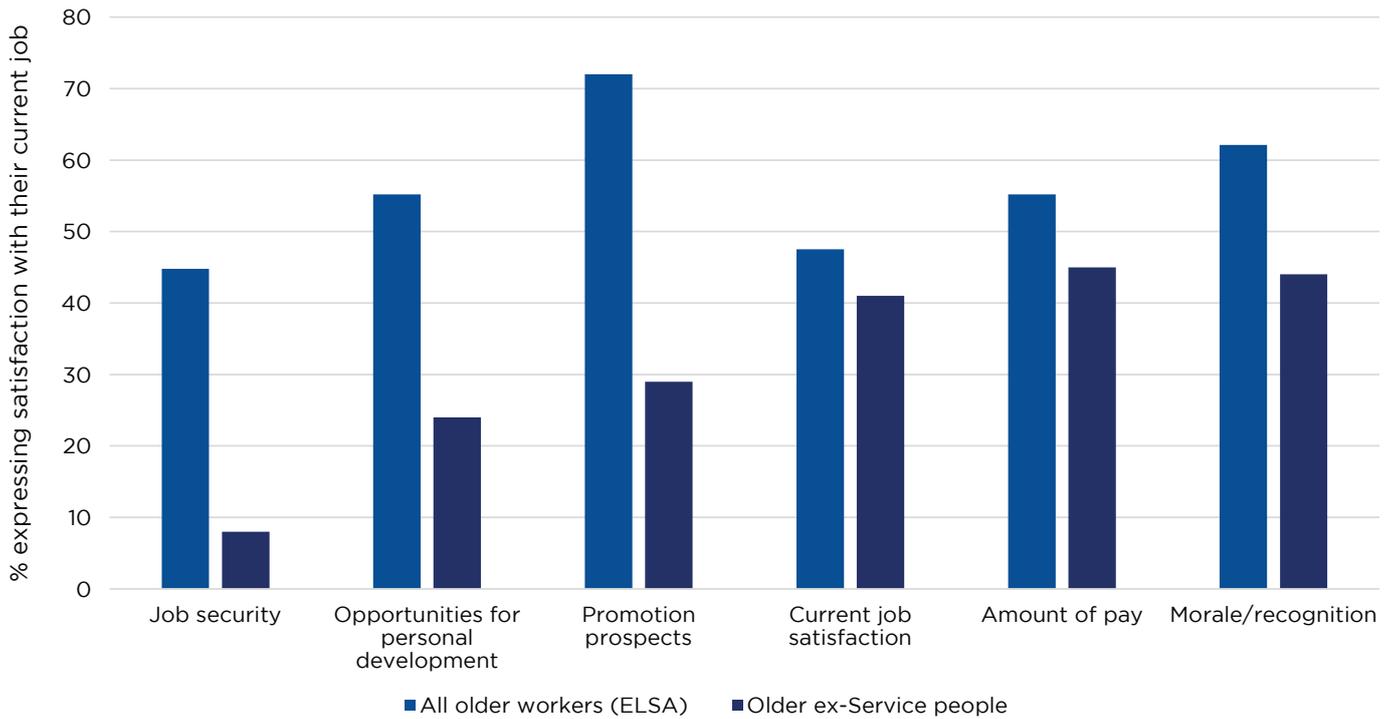
Older Service people's responses to the AFCAS survey suggest that two factors most significantly influence their decisions on when and how to leave military service. These are the goal of achieving better work-life balance (especially regarding the needs of spouses and families) and the security of stable jobs, pay and benefits. Poor work-life balance may persuade many to leave the service, while the security of stable jobs provides an incentive to remain. Older Service people have mixed feelings about new work opportunities. While many are seeking new challenges in civilian work, others wish to stay in the Service and so seek an extension of their contract (i.e. an extension of their engagement or commission). Poor work morale (which may at least in part be caused by the lack of recognition of the value of the work they are doing) is a factor leading to job dissatisfaction, both in the armed Services and among older workers generally.

REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY

Finally, it is important to consider the destination of older Service people once they leave military service and the reasons why some older former Service people do not transition into civilian employment. Few older former Service people are out of work because they are taking part in full-time training. This does not necessarily mean that older former Service people are not retraining. Many may be doing so on a part-time basis while also in work. On the other hand, only a little more than a third of economically inactive former Service people over 50 consider themselves retired which may indicate that most intend to return to work at some point in the future.

Unfortunately, CTPAS provides only limited insight into the reasons for economic inactivity of regular service personnel who used CTP services. These figures represent respondents who are economically inactive within the first year after discharge from the military. Comparative data is available from LFS. The problem with CTPAS is that it classifies almost half of older former Service people who are economically inactive as 'other' with most of the remaining as retired.

TABLE 7:

REASONS FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY

REASON FOR ECONOMIC INACTIVITY	EX-SERVICE PEOPLE (CTPAS)		ALL WORKERS (LFS)
	UNDER 50S (%)	50 AND OVER (%)	50 AND OVER (%)
Looking after family	9	-	10
Education/training/volunteering	45	6	0
Medical reasons	9	-	24
Travelling/abroad	13	5	-
Retired	2	38	66
Other (Service leavers who were on a career break or reason was unknown)	22	48	-

SOURCES: CTPAS N=919 AND LFS N=8569

CONCLUSION

In this section, we used four datasets to explore how older Service leavers' work influences their future plans and decisions on whether or not to transition to civilian work. About two-thirds of older Service people are planning to transition out of the military at the time their current assignment ends, or before that date. Their future plans do not differ significantly from their younger equivalents other than having somewhat more certainty over planned activity at the conclusion of their postings. Neither are their plans significantly different from those of older workers, two-thirds of whom make at least one job transition over a five-year period.

The significant difference of a late-career transition out of military Service compared with similar transitions in the civilian world is that the former is more likely to be pursued with the intent of a second career rather than a deceleration of workload or transition into retirement. While family circumstances have a dominant influence on older Service people's intentions to leave, they also want opportunities for new challenges and in order to achieve these, they are willing to sacrifice the stable income, benefits and job security associated with military service.

Because of the limitations mentioned above, the descriptive statistics only provide a snapshot of older former Service leavers' job transitions. In the next chapter, we discuss qualitative and quantitative data which was gathered in the research. We have added the following questions to the two surveys:

1) Demographic questions including details of age, gender, rank, age (at time of transition out of the military), Armed Forces branch and ethnicity have been added. (These will help us to explore how military status intersects with other characteristics, to influence the manner in which transitions to civilian work can lead to different career outcomes.)

2) We have added a question to the former Service person survey in order to explore how and why former Service people transition to reduced hours or less secure work and the degree to which this is a reflection of underemployment. (This is because the survey data do not provide insight into the experience of older Service people who transition into atypical work, including part-time employment or fixed-term work.)

3) We have asked former Service people to provide their last military rank before leaving the Armed Forces as well as the job rank for their current employment. By doing so, we mapped career transition destinations. By adding demographic questions, we identified groups (by rank, gender, and [Armed] Service) who are accelerating, decelerating and staying at the same level of job status once they leave regular service.

4) We asked former Service people reasons for their inactivity in order to have a clearer picture of the experiences of older Service people who are no longer in work. Those respondents who are economically inactive were asked to give the reason why they are inactive (e.g. for short-term or long-term health reasons; because of caring responsibilities; because no job is available as well as whether they want to work or not. This question was used to explore why groups of older former Service have been unable to find work as well as whether they are still seeking employment.

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork involved conducting focus groups and online surveys with three target populations:

- Currently serving personnel transitioning at the age of 50+: The subject group was limited to those who have notified their commanding officers of their intent to leave the military. Because the transition period for military Service leavers is two years, the minimum age for participation of this group is 48.

- Ex-serving personnel who have already made their transition at or after the age of 50

- Employers (both those which employ former Service people and those which do not).

In addition, the research team interviewed members of organisations which have an interest in supporting Service people.

The focus group protocols are included in the annex. Survey data and anonymised transcripts are being deposited into the UK Data Archives so that other researchers with an interest in the experiences of 50+ Service leavers in the job market can review the data. The data can also be obtained by contacting the report's co-authors.

THE AIM OF THE DISCUSSIONS WAS TO IDENTIFY BARRIERS SERVICE LEAVERS FACE TO SUSTAINABLE WORK

RESEARCH ETHICS AND GOOD PRACTICE

All research participants (focus group participants, interviewees and people who completed the online surveys) were provided with written statements which explained their participation in the research: the aims and objectives of the project; how their data was collected; how their data was stored and their rights to access to the data. Appendix 2 shows the statement of informed consent template. Research instruments such as interview protocols, questionnaires and statement of informed consent were reviewed and approved by the University of Hull Faculty of Business, Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee.

Because some of the research participants were current Serving people, a favourable opinion was required and obtained from the Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee (MODREC). The MODREC also reviewed research instruments to ensure best practice in research ethics. The MODREC approval process takes several months and future researchers should allow for this.

INTERVIEWS

We interviewed experts in government, employer organisations, and charities with an interest in supporting Service people. In our discussions, we focused on training programmes, job placement support and other programmes available for service people transitioning to civilian work. We also discussed experiences which older Service people experience in transitioning into civilian work. Interviews were conducted with the following organisations:

• RAF Benevolent Fund

• ABF The Soldiers' Charity

• Poppy Scotland

• Royal British Legion

• Combat Stress

• Help for Heroes

• North East Local Enterprise Partnership

• Ministry of Defence

In addition, detailed feedback on the report was provided by Blind Veterans UK and Reserved Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA). RFCA and Poppy Scotland also provided support in organising focus group discussions.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were conducted to understand the experiences and perceptions of both those who are in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces and those who already done so. The aim of the discussions was to identify barriers Service leavers face to sustainable work; opportunities for making use of Service leavers' skills, experiences and abilities; good practice in terms of resettlement and improvements to career management which can be developed, piloted and embedded.

In total, thirty-six former Service people, twenty-one Service people who were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces and 27 employers took part in the focus group discussions or were interviewed. Although the samples may seem small relative to the number of 50+ Service leavers in the general population, it is important to note that the sampling was purposive rather than probability. Our target was to learn from the experiences of a range of 50+ Service leavers and within the project, we were able to speak with people with a variety of experiences, skills and backgrounds. We spoke with 50+ Service leavers who made what they considered to be successful job transitions; those who were unemployed or under-employed; those with relatively stable civilian careers and those who had experienced multiple job transitions since leaving the Armed Forces. To do this, we conducted twelve workshops in England and Scotland:

Seven focus group discussions were held with Service people who have made a transition into civilian work. Focus group participants were found through invitations circulated through the Officers' Association, RFEA, RFCA and Poppy Scotland. Focus group discussion participants were at different career stages including permanent employment, casual work, self-employment and fixed-term contracts. We also spoke to a group of unemployed officers. Four of the group discussions were with participants who had held officer rank while three were from senior rank.

Four focus group discussions comprised people who had served notice of their intention to leave the Armed Forces. These were organised with the support of the Ministry of Defence which sent out an email to CTP service users. Because of the wide geographical spread of people who were interested in taking part in discussions, we had difficulties in organising focus groups at mutually convenient times and locations. Accordingly, ten individual interviews were organised with currently serving people.

Six group discussions were held with employers. Employers were invited to workshop discussions in Bristol, Leeds, London, Hull and Newcastle. Five of the employer group discussions involved respondents who were invited via organisations including the Institute of Directors, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and Humber Local Enterprise Partnership. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of older workers and military former Service people as well as the intersection between the two. One group was made up of respondents from organisations which are members of ERS and AFC. These participants were asked to discuss the HR policies which are in place to support military staff and experiences working in the scheme. Focus group participants were compensated for travel expenses and former Service people who participated in the focus group discussions were given gift vouchers as a thank you for their support.

Table 8 shows the focus group and interviews which were conducted.

TABLE 8:
FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEWS

DATE	LOCATION	EX-OFFICERS	EX- OTHER RANK	EMPLOYERS	CURRENT OFFICERS	CURRENT OTHER RANK
11/09/2018	EDINBURGH	7			1	
02/10/2018	BRISTOL	7		5	1	
04/10/2018	LEEDS	2		1		
25/10/2018	LONDON	4	2	7		
02/11/2018	HULL			4		
06/11/2018	LONDON	5			1	
07/11/2018	NEWCASTLE			1		
09/11/2018	CARLTON BARRACKS			2		
13/11/2018	ONLINE		4			
15/02/2018	ONLINE		2			
29/06/2019	ONLINE		3			2
14/06/2019	LONDON				1	1
17/06/2019	YORK				2	1
03/07/2019	ONLINE			1		
19/05/2019	WEST MIDLANDS			1		
10/03/2019	ONLINE			1		
06/07/2019				1		
07/07/2019				1		
08/07/2019				1		
11/07/2019				1		
12/07/2019					1	
12/07/2019					1	
13/07/2019					1	
13/07/2019					1	
13/07/2019						1
13/07/2019					1	
14/07/2019					1	
14/07/2019					1	
15/07/2019					1	
15/07/2019					1	
08/07/2019					1	
TOTAL		**25**	**11**	**27**	**16**	**5**

ONLINE SURVEY

Following the focus group discussion, an online survey was conducted with the three groups. Current and former Service people were asked:

- About themselves (e.g. which part of the armed forces they belonged to)
- About their experience transitioning out of the military
- About their experiences of or expectations about working in the civilian world
- Their recommendations on how to better support people who are transitioning out of the military at or after the age of 50.

The ex-serving personnel and currently serving personnel surveys were designed similarly to ensure that their results could be compared. The questions were piloted and adapted following feedback. People who took part in the pilot (all of whom were ex- or current Service people) were asked to comment on the clarity of questions which were being asked; the relevance of questions in relation to the experiences of 50+ Service leavers; and the length of time it took

to complete the survey. Adaptations to feedback primarily related to military terminology which was used and clarification of questions which were asked. Participants in the pilot were able to understand the structure of the questionnaire and answer all of the questions to which they were signposted. The employer survey was also piloted with managers who offered suggestions on the phrasing of questions but no substantive changes.

The surveys comprised twenty-seven questions, most of which are in a multiple-choice format, with a few being open-ended. The survey was designed to take between ten and fifteen minutes of the respondents' time for completion and conducted online, meaning that participants were able to take part regardless of their location as long as they had access to an appropriate electronic device. Former Service people were approached through the Officers' Association and RFEA. Currently serving people were approached via an email from the Ministry of Defence. In total, 183 former Service people and thirty-five current Serving people responded to the survey. Table 9 shows the profile of the respondents.

TABLE 9:
50+ SERVICE LEAVERS SURVEY PROFILE

STATUS	Ex-Service	84	Current Serving	16						
TIME SINCE LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES (EX-SERVICE)	Under 1 year	7	1 year	16	2-5 years	44	Over 5 years	33		
AGE	Under 55	27	55-59	40	60-64	20	65-69	8	70-80	5
GENDER	Male	95	Female	4						
REGION	London, South East and South West	52	Midlands and Eastern	19	North, North West, Y & H	17	Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland	12		
RANK	Officers	79	Senior ranks	21						
HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION	Higher degree	45	First degree	9	Other qualification	24	NVQ, A level or O level	18	No qualifications	1
ARMED FORCES (EX-SERVING)	Army	56	Navy	15	RAF	28	Royal Marines	1		

We also conducted a survey of employers. Employers were recruited using the same method as that used for the focus groups. A booster sample was drawn from Survey Monkey Panel Audience. Criteria for participation in the survey was for participants to have some HRM experience. While we sought out the participation of HRM managers and directors, we also requested the participation of business owners, senior managers with responsibilities other than HRM, middle managers and line managers. The wide scope for participation was in recognition of the fact that HRM policies and practices are formulated through negotiation at the board level and HRM decision-making is in many organisations delegated to departmental and team levels.

This survey explored employers' attitudes toward and experiences with recruiting and retaining former Service people and older people (as well as 50+ Service leavers in particular). Respondents were told that they did not need to have prior experience in employing former Service people in order to take part in the survey. They were asked about:

- Their organisations (size, industrial group, location)

- Their own position in the company

- Whether their organisation had experience recruiting and employing former Service people and older former Service leavers, in particular, and what the experience had been like

- Their attitudes towards and perceptions of recruiting and retaining (older) former Service leavers.

In total 345 people responded to the employer survey from 323 employers.[18]

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18 A small number of employers generated responses from more than one manager. This is because we asked for responses from a range of different kinds of managers like HR directors or line managers.

TABLE 10:

EMPLOYER SURVEY

SECTOR	Public	35	Private	61	Voluntary	4
ROLE	HR director	14	Business owner	16	General manager	16
ROLE	Senior manager (not HR)	19	Middle manager	17	Line manager	10
LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF RECRUITMENT	Very aware	56	Aware	41	Not very aware	2
RESPONSIBLE FOR RECRUITING STAFF	Responsible for setting policies	56	Recruiting in team	30	Not responsible	14
EX-SERVICE PERSON	Yes	24	Family members	28	No	48

The survey questionnaire of current Serving personnel drew questions from three sources. First, in order to compare perspectives of currently Serving personnel with former Service people and employers, questions were replicated in the three questionnaires. (For example, one question asked currently serving personnel how long they expected it would take to find their first jobs. A corresponding question asked former Service people of how long it actually took them to find their first jobs.) Second, questions were drawn from focus group discussions in order to generalise observations and experiences shared with us by discussion participants who were in the process of transitioning out of military service. Third, in order to compare the experiences and perceptions of our military subjects with those of the general population in terms of career transitions, questions were phrased to mirror some of those appearing in the English Longitudinal Survey on Ageing and the Labour Force Survey.
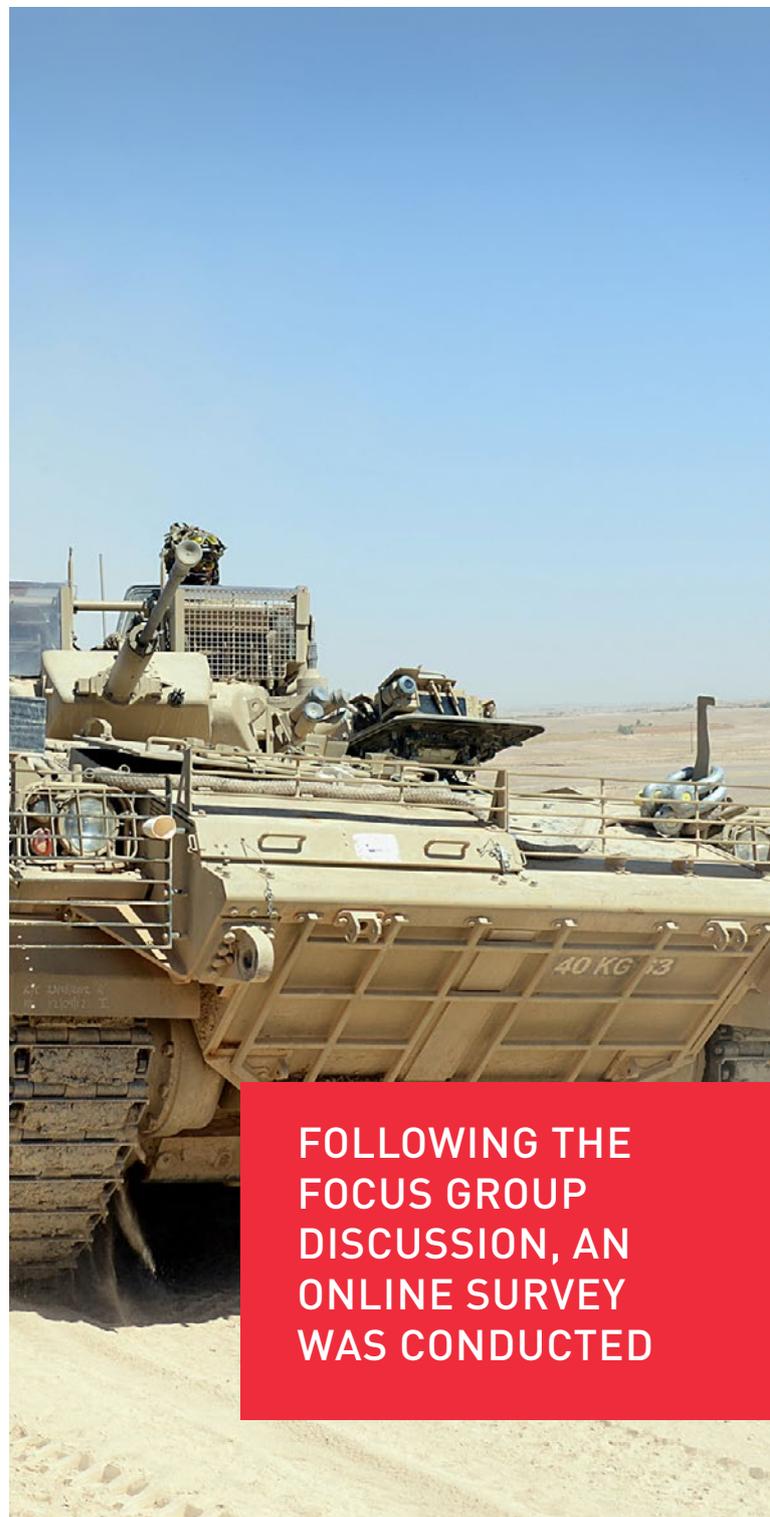
FOLLOWING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION, AN ONLINE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED

DATA ANALYSIS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for the research was Life Course Theory (LFT) (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003) which has proven to be a useful model for understanding the interplay of multiple trajectories at the individual (e.g. career, family, social networks) and macro (e.g. economic and political climate); the impact which different trajectories have on one another; and how an individual's agency is structured and shaped by dynamics in the family, workplace, community and national contexts (Sweet & Moen, 2006). LCT is particularly useful for understanding the experiences of 50+ Service leavers. Although the primary theme of the discussions was employment, Service leavers rarely discussed employment in isolation. Rather, they talked about decisions they made regarding their careers within the context of changes in their families (e.g. pressure from a spouse to transition out of regular service); social networks (e.g. friends of the same age transitioning to civilian life at the same time); and broader changes both within and outside of the Armed Forces. Further, 50+ Service leavers discussed the impact which economic circumstances and cultural norms (e.g. the prevalence of ageism in the UK job market) had on their ability to find work which they valued.

There is also recognition within LCT of how age-graded transitions lead to changed trajectories (Grenier, 2012). These transitions can be planned (e.g. a decision to start a family) or unplanned (e.g. experiencing an illness), but the importance of the transition is conditioned by when it occurred during the course of the individual's life. Within the context of this research, it is tautological to say that the transition of leaving Regular service has an impact on Service leavers' career trajectories. It could lead to a change in occupational status, pay, levels of job security, and identity. However, the timing of the transition both in terms of age and length of service can magnify disruptions which the transition has on 50+ Service leavers.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Drawing on the two cornerstones of LCT (the interplay of trajectories and the timing of transitions), we used thematic analysis to explore the experiences of 50+ Service leavers in the job market. Thematic analysis is 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79) and is recognised for its flexibility. Using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12, we developed a coding structure which explored events prior, during and after transitions out of the Armed Forces. A single coding tree was used to code focus group discussions and interviews with people who were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces, those who have already done so, employers, and representatives of stakeholders. This approach allowed us to identify emerging patterns as well as convergent and divergent themes as expressed by research participants with different perspectives (Burns, 2010). Coded material was cross-checked by the two members of the research team in order to ensure consistency and reliability.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Descriptive figures are presented in the report. The questionnaire surveys were analysed using SPSS software. Because the questions posed to Service leavers and employers were matched in phrasing as closely as possible, comparisons were presented in order to triangulate the perspectives of the two groups (as well as to compare the expectations of Service people who were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces with the experiences of those who had already done so. For the survey of Service leavers, based on a confidence level of 95%, there was a margin of error of +/- 7.6%. The margin of error for the employer survey also based on a confidence level of 95% was +/- 5.2%. The responses of current Service people was a much higher +/-16.5% due to the low response rate which we discuss under limitations.

LIMITATIONS

Even though a considerable effort was made by the research team in partnership with the Officers' Association to reach our target group in order to encourage participation in both the focus group discussions and survey, it was not always possible to find participants who were available for events when they were scheduled. Recruitment was challenging as 50+ Service leaver participants had to be drawn from a very specific segment of the overall population. The OA, RFEA and other military charities contacted potential participants through newsletters, emails, websites and social media. New rules on data protection (particularly GDPR and PECR[19]) constrained ability of charities to email service leavers except where suitable permissions existed. A project microsite was created to enable service leavers and employers to learn more about the project and register to participate.

Finding participants amongst 50+ Service leavers who had not completely transitioned out of the Armed Forces was particularly challenging. A mass email was sent out to current Service people who were within our target group. However, it generated a small response rate. Because the data collection was governed by the approach set out in the MODREC application, we were limited in our ability to search for focus group participants. Therefore, we prioritised reaching every current serving person who expressed interest in participating and who matched our target group. In order to address low response rates when they occurred, the following strategies were employed:

- Where it proved difficult to organise in-person focus group discussions, discussions were carried out online using the GoToMeeting platform. By conducting online discussions, we were able to offer greater flexibility to group participants in terms of timing. Participants who were located too far away from our hosted events were able to participate in online discussions. The format and structure of the online discussions were the same as the hosted events as well as protocols like the statement of informed consent.

- Although we initially aimed for focus groups of between 5-8 participants, our ability to manage the number of people who showed up was limited. Two events had a large number of participants: Edinburgh (10 participants) and Bristol (13 participants). In the former case, the focus group was scheduled alongside another event taking part. Many of the focus groups had a smaller number of participants (2-3). This limited the scope for discussion between participants to, for example, share common experiences. However, it also gave us time to explore in greater depth how the participants navigated the job market and events which shaped their job searches.

- Some discussants were unable to attend any focus group discussions (hosted or online) and, in these cases, we conducted telephone interviews. We conducted individual interviews only when participation in focus groups was not possible. Although individual interviews missed out on the discussions and shared experiences which emerged from the focus group discussions, we were nevertheless able to talk with a higher number and broader range of 50+ Service leavers than if we had only spoken to people who were able to attend focus groups.

- Although there were some difficulties in finding focus group participants, we were able to meet the target number of participants for the qualitative part of the project in terms of former Service people, current Service people, officers, senior ranks and employers.

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19   General Data Protection Regulations 2016 and Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003.

Alongside the difficulties in finding participants in the focus groups, there were also some challenges in finding participants in the survey. Targets were reached in the participation of former Service people (both officers and senior ranks). Participation was encouraged by the OA and RFEA and two reminders were sent out within a one-month period. Employers were initially reached using a database of organisations that work with the Officers' Association to support Service leavers into work. Using this database, fifty-seven responses were generated. In order to generate a larger response, we used Survey Monkey audience which generated an additional 300 responses. The reliability of the Survey Monkey audience has been tested for reliability and validity and found to be a platform comparable to large market research surveys. (Bentley, Daskalova, & White, 2017)

The number of current Service people who agreed to take part in the survey (35) was well below our target. We were only able to send out one mailshot to current Service people and no reminders. While the Officers' Association mailed a mass letter to Service Resettlement Advisers asking them to encourage their clients who were within our target group to take part, replies were limited and many resettlement offices lacked a named individual to whom to send the request. Because our outreach to current Service people was governed by the MODREC application, we were unable to explore alternative ways to reach this target group. Accordingly, where we report survey findings, we primarily rely on the database of former Service people and only quote responses of current Service people when comparing the two.

TIMELINE

The research was carried out from April 2018 to November 2019. As discussed under the Limitations above, we experienced considerable delays due to difficulties in arranging focus group discussions and obtaining MODREC favourable opinion. The research timeline was as follows:

- April to June 2018: Literature review

- July 2018 to September 2018: Secondary analysis

- July 2018 to December 2018: Write up of desk research

- August 2018 to October 2018: Stakeholder interviews

- August 2018 to March 2019: MODREC application and Favourable Opinion

- September 2018 to February 2019: Former Service people focus group discussions and employer focus group discussions

- February 2019 to June 2019: Write up of completed focus group discussions and interviews

- June 2019 to July 2019: Focus group discussions and interviews with current Service people

- July 2019 to October 2019: Write up of report and employer summary

- October 2019: Feedback from interviewees and focus group participants

RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL INSTRUMENTS

Interview guides, survey questionnaires and statement of informed consent are included in the appendix.

FINDINGS

FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss the findings of the focus group discussions, interviews and survey.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented alongside one another with the former presented in order to provide a broad picture of the experiences of 50+ Service leavers and perceptions of them by employer; and the latter to provide a more granular understanding the dynamics of leaving the Armed Forces after the age of 50 and looking for civilian work.

The section is structured according to the research objectives. It is structured to provide a narrative based on experiences before, during and after the transition out of the Armed Forces.

TABLE 11:

HOW SERVICE LEAVERS FELT ABOUT THEIR MILITARY CAREERS

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NEITHER	BAD	VERY BAD
Feel valued (Current Serving)	0	60	28	13	0
Feel valued (Ex-Service)	8	31	24	36	0
Salary (Current Serving)	19	63	19	0	0
Salary (Ex-Service)	30	54	13	1	0
Quality of work (Current Serving)	9	47	37	6	0
Quality of work (Ex-Service)	29	48	13	8	0
Work environment (Current Serving)	6	50	25	19	0
Work environment (Ex-Service)	25	42	20	10	2
Learning opportunities (Current Serving)	21	53	19	6	0
Learning opportunities (Ex-Service)	21	43	26	9	0
Opportunities to help others (Current Serving)	25	56	19	0	0
Opportunities to help others (Ex-Service)	31	46	18	4	1
Relationship with colleagues (Current Serving)	41	53	6	0	0
Relationship with colleagues (Ex-Service)	56	34	8	1	1

CURRENT SERVING: 32
EX-SERVING: 167

BEING AN OLDER FORMER SERVICE PERSON

How do 50+ Service leavers think about their place in the job market and the skills, experience and knowledge which they have to offer prospective employers? To answer this question, we asked focus group participants to reflect back on their careers in the Armed Forces and discuss the skills which they had acquired and which could be valuable in the job market; the support they had received to prepare for departure from military service; and how they believed employers viewed them as job seekers with long military service.

EXPERIENCE IN THE ARMED FORCES

Service leavers in both the survey and focus group discussions were asked to think back on working life in the Armed Forces. A majority of Service leavers (both those who were currently transitioning and those who had already done so) were positive about working in the Armed Forces in terms of salary, quality of work, the work environment, learning opportunities and workplace relationships. Over one in three former Service people, however, felt unvalued when leaving military service.

Service leavers discussed a variety of reasons why they had decided to enlist in the Armed Forces. Serving their country, making use of learning opportunities, and taking on challenges were all cited as important factors in deciding to join.

> "What has got me out of bed in the morning has always been the fact that the Army is serving the country, which might seem a bit high and mighty but, in essence, I never joined the Army to make money."
>
> Former officer, London

Joining the Armed Forces was also described by many as a decision made within the context of a limited range of employment choices available. Some Service leavers talked about the difficulties which they had in finding a job upon leaving school or entering the job market during a period of recession.

For them, experience in the job market was both a distant and negative experience. This past experience then shaped how they perceived their place in the labour market today. Some recalled their struggles in finding work in their youth and were nervous that this experience might be repeated as they sought work in their mid-careers.

Career progression within the Armed Forces was described as structured and well managed. Many talked about the opportunities which they had had to acquire skills or take on new responsibilities. Participants said that new assignments were given to them on the recommendation of their commanding officers who explained to them how they would benefit from such appointments. At the same time, they described being encouraged to maintain personal development plans (PDP) (a key recommendation of the 2014 Ashcroft report). This created a dichotomy for some in which they had relatively little control while in Service but an expectation that they would have primary responsibility for developing and documenting their career-based skills for when they would eventually transition to civilian life.

Some Service leavers said that they thrived in an environment in which there was a variety of opportunities to learn new skills which would later be valuable. A former member of the RAF, for example, said that with each posting, his commanding officer discussed with him how each job would be a 'stepping stone' to a new career.

> "The old joke we had was you'd learn to leave the day you joined the RAF."
>
> Former senior rank, London

Maintaining one's PDP is an individual responsibility. Some Service people reported success in finding roles which they thrived in and the acquisition of training and formal qualifications which could then be used for transferring their skills to civilian jobs.

One participant, for example, said that while in the Army, he had specialised in outdoor recreation which he then mobilised into becoming a fitness specialist. Others, however, felt that they had not spent enough time while in service in building their PDPs. Work pressure in some appointments led many to overlook planning for their civilian careers and future plans.

"The trapdoor was pulled and suddenly I'm left standing there, fairly naked, and thinking, 'What the hell do I do now?' because the throttle is pushed so far forward and I had not thought about the end at all because, if I did, I wouldn't have been doing what I'd done effectively up to that point."

Former officer, Leeds

Difficulties in maintaining PDPs were especially experienced by people who were assigned to duties overseas. Overseas deployment was discussed by several participants as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, giving them the opportunity to pick up key skills like working in a cross-cultural environment, while on the other, taking them away from the UK and the resources and support which they need to secure civilian work.

One Service leaver noted that shortly after he had notified his commanding officer of his intent to leave the Service, he was offered an overseas assignment which he thought was a dream job. However, it distracted him from his career planning and limited his access to training and other resources which he would later need to find a job. Once he completed his assignment, he experienced panic in deciding what to do next.

"He was very much of the opinion, reaching 35 years, the next six months is payback. You take the time to do your needs."

Current transitioning officer, York

This view was not universally shared. Some Service leavers reported having supportive line managers who gave them the time to plan for their civilian careers. One Service person who is currently in the transition process said her manager gave her light duties in her last six months of duty.

OVER ONE IN THREE FORMER SERVICE PEOPLE FELT UNVALUED WHEN LEAVING MILITARY SERVICE

TABLE 12:

MOST AND LEAST IMPORTANT SKILLS

	TECHNICAL	SOCIAL SKILLS	LEADERSHIP	INDUSTRY BASED EXPERIENCE	EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY	ABILITY TO FIT IN	PERSONAL SKILLS
Ex-service MOST VALUABLE	15	7	34	13	6	6	5
Employers MOST NEEDED	38	16	10	18	6	9	3
Ex-service LEAST VALUABLE	7	7	6	14	9	4	5
Employers LEAST NEEDED	7	7	12	18	18	10	39

FORMER SERVICE: 157

EMPLOYERS: 284

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

We asked focus group respondents what skills they had acquired through military service. In the survey, we asked Service leavers to rank their skills from most to least important. We also asked employers what skills were most and least important. We will cross-reference these findings below.

Seventeen skills were identified as having been acquired through either training or experience.[20] Amongst these were:

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Officers discussed leadership training which they had acquired through the course of their careers, starting during their basic training (at Sandhurst, Dartmouth or Cranwell), and said that their roles invariably required the ability to persuade, advocate, motivate and mobilise people to act as a team and to perform to the best of their ability. Leadership in the military was described as 'asking your team to follow you over the top...knowing they might die.' (Former officer, London) It was recognised that leadership in the civilian world may be different to leadership in the military, but most of our interviewees and focus group members believed the leadership skills they had gained in the military would be useful for organisations seeking to retain and motivate employees. However, it is not clear that employers always shared this point of view.

> "At the heart of getting teams to work in a common way for a common good, to get complex tasks done, you're going to need a range of different skills. And I see myself as quite versed in pulling those people, those skills, that expertise together."
>
> Former officer, online

Some former Service people wanted to mobilise their leadership skills in order to secure executive-level roles within organisations. They believed that they could offer civilian organisations new perspectives on intractable problems. While some success stories were reported, many expressed frustration because the kind of leadership they were offering civilian employers was not seen as relevant for the employing organisation. One former officer said that he had applied to join the board of directors of several NHS trusts only to be passed over in favour of candidates with experience managing in the health sector. The need for sector-specific leadership experience was also highlighted by employers who stressed, from their perspectives, the limitations of military-based experience. It was also thought that Service leavers conflate leadership with management skills which are needed for executive positions. While senior managers need to be able to lead people through, for example, team building and motivating staff, they also need other skills such as planning, strategy, finance and a host of other capabilities. Service leavers may well have most if not all of these skills, but some employers thought that 50+ Service leavers, especially former officers, miss out in presenting the broader range of management skills which employers could make use of.

> "You say, 'Okay, what is your skill set? and they say, Leadership.'
>
> I say, 'Okay, I get that. But please recognise that you might've had 30 years of what you term leadership in the forces, do you not think if you're going into a commercial organisation that there are also people in there who have been there for 30 years who are also actually quite good at that as well?' "
>
> Employer, London

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20   Other skills mentioned were: Aviation skills, vetting, teaching, health and safety, finance, soft skills, driving, military skills. Some of these are discussed below while others are subsumed into discussion on other skills.

It is significant that while 38% of Service leavers (and 41% of ex-officers) report leadership as their most valuable skills, only 10% of employers say that those are the skills which are most important when recruiting employees. In fact, a greater proportion (12%) says that these skills are least important to them. Thus, many former Service people, especially officers, are offering skills which employers are uncertain that they can use.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Employers were most likely to say that they were looking for technical skills. 14% of senior rank Service leavers reported their technical expertise as their most valuable skills. Categories of jobs which were mentioned as requiring military acquired skills included engineering, mechanical, health and safety, heavy goods driving and handling dangerous materials. Employers valued military acquired skills, especially when they were experiencing deficits in skilled staff.

Although military acquired technical skills were valued by employers, it was noted that top-up training and accreditation of skills are often needed. In many cases, Service leavers acquired this necessary training and accreditation while in service during the transition period or shortly afterwards. Service leavers generally spoke positively of the training available through CTP to enable them to transfer their skills. Some managers also said that they offered top-up training in order to tap into skills which are available through the military. For example, a logistics firm offers former Service people training to get their HGV licences. The training was described as 'good value for money' as former drivers of military vehicles only needed a small amount of top-up training to be able to transfer their skills into driving heavy goods vehicles.

"I've also known quite a few who've come out of health and safety and specialised in dealing with asbestos, or hazardous chemicals. Things that they were a specialist in, in the Army, which civilian employers are screaming out for, especially petrol operatives and people who need those HazMat and HazChem qualifications that they come out of the Army with. Also, they come out of the Army with the heavy goods driving qualifications on all classes of vehicles and all that training that goes with it. They get quite plum jobs."

Employer, Carlton Barracks

PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Project management experience and skills were identified by both Service leavers and employers as skill sets widely sought by employers in a range of sectors. It was thought that the skills which are acquired through managing military operations could be utilised in organisations facing large and complex operational tasks. Some Service leavers discussed roles which they had undertaken post-transition, which did indeed involve managing or coordinating large projects. They argued that the skills which Service people bring to project management include being able to deliver on time; coordinating multiple and interlocking tasks; leading staff to deliver outcomes; and keeping project teams focused on their objectives. These skills are transferable to civilian projects and are especially valuable when the business faces a tight timetable and/or budget. While not all employers may have been convinced of this view, skills of project management developed in military service would seem to be highly marketable in civilian life.

"There is a bit of a shortage of good project managers. I've personally struggled to find project managers, particularly for a recent IT project. It's not about them necessarily needing an in-depth knowledge of the IT software, but it is about coordinating those that have that in-depth knowledge, and bringing those project management skills to the fore."

Employer, Hull

SKILLS ACQUIRED THROUGH MANAGING MILITARY OPERATIONS COULD BE UTILISED IN ORGANISATIONS FACING LARGE AND COMPLEX OPERATIONAL TASKS

MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Broader management skills acquired through military service and transferable to civilian life include skills in human resource management, finance, IT, logistics and risk management. Some employers noted that differences between military and civilian organisations can sometimes be exaggerated and could, therefore, obscure skills transferability from the Services to civilian employment.

"A senior non-commissioned officer or warrant officer brings a lot with them, their management skills, because they've managed a platoon of men that's 30 strong, and for a warrant officer they've got a company of 100 strong...

So, they bring a hell of a lot of administrative and management skills as well as their infantry background."

Employer, Online

HARD TO TRANSFER SKILLS

Some skills such as combat and artillery training were noted as difficult to transfer to civilian work. Several respondents noted that people with hard-to-transfer skills may need greater support in finding sustainable work.

Although it was recognised that some 50+ Service leavers have specialisms which are not easily transferable, they may also have training and management skills as well as work ethos which employers seek. It was noted that they often need more intensive training (sometimes provided by charities as well as CTP) to develop those skills which employers can more easily use.

"Well, some trades are not transferable. There are a couple of trades that spring to mind. Artillery. You know, artillery is not a transferrable skill... I remember when I was in the business of transition, there used to be a handful of trades whereby people required dedicated support to give them the best chance of being successful in transition."

Poppy Scotland

IMAGES OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS

A large part of the focus group discussions concerned perceptions of 50+ Service leavers. Employers hold assumptions of the group and stereotypes relating to age and military status can often overlap. 50+ Service leavers discussed how they felt they were perceived by employers and how different images are either challenged or reinforced by themselves in terms of presentation of their value to prospective employers. Their images both as former Service people and older job seekers are neither wholly positive nor negative, but they do impact on 50+ Service leavers' ability to secure work, particularly in the context of employers making recruitment decisions with limited information and under time pressures.

In the survey, we asked both 50+ Service leavers and employers whether they agreed with the statements shown in Table 13.

TABLE 13:

PERCEPTIONS OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS (PERCENT AGREEING)

	50+ SERVICE LEAVERS	EMPLOYERS
Employers can make good use of military skills	82	49
Ex-military have range of experiences	91	53
Ex-military are adaptable to changing situations	95	46
Ex-military have good decision making skills	90	46
Ex-military are dedicated and loyal	86	43
Employing 50+ ex-military is socially responsible thing to do	34	25
Lack experience in working in the industry	76	27
Difficult to match their skills with the needs of the organisation	48	30
Experience is not relevant to the needs of the organisation	48	23
Salary expectations are too high	29	24
Are not adaptable to working outside the military	46	18
Unwilling to learn new skills	13	9
Employers worry about employing people with PTSD	36	16
Other diversity targets which employers prioritise	41	10

SERVICE LEAVERS: 197

EMPLOYERS: 328

> "We've got this tale of Afghanistan and Iraq that, somehow, anyone who has served there is now a bit nuts… we need to get back to the [the image of the military as] the best-trained workforce in Britain."
>
> Former officer, Edinburgh

Mental health and Armed Service leavers: The stereotype of Armed Services leavers being 'mad, bad and sad' was mentioned by some 50+ Service leavers as something which they personally experienced. They felt that perceptions of Service people as having mental health issues needed to be challenged by the whole of the former Services community. In the survey, former Service people were over twice as likely as employers to say that employers worry about employing people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)[21]. Some believed that campaigns aimed at providing support to Service people with PTSD could unintentionally create the image that everyone who leaves military service has a mental health condition. One former Service person who had experienced PTSD after transitioning out of the service said that he was reluctant to ask for help because he thought it would reinforce a negative stereotype with his employer. Perceptions of former Service people as having PTSD can also eclipse their strengths including good skills and a strong work ethos. In fact, only 3% of Service people have been diagnosed with a mental health condition (Defence Committee, 2018) and having a mental health issue does not prevent a Service leaver from being a productive worker.

Representatives of Combat Stress and Poppy Scotland noted that many Service leavers who are managing a mental health issue are also productive workers. While it is important to challenge

assumptions of the frequency of PTSD or any other mental health issue, it is equally crucial to address the discrimination and stereotypes of those who are managing such conditions.

Being disciplined but too regimented: 43% of employers said they valued the discipline of military service and saw former Service employees as dedicated and loyal. Service people, especially older ones, were described as 'the first to arrive at work and the last to leave in the evening' (Employer, London) Some employers said that they actively recruited former Service people because they were dependable especially when under pressure. 50+ Service people described military discipline as an asset, reinforced by long service which they thought presented the image of dedication.

> "We have an ethos of getting the job done, which some people don't share. They just turn up to work to earn money."
>
> Former officer, Bristol

Against this image, however, some employers described Service people as regimented and focused on the military way of carrying out tasks. Some employers worried about former Service people being disruptive as their ways of working are different from those of the organisation. This was also reinforced by age stereotypes. Some employers expressed the view that older Service leavers would be unable to adapt to 'the business way'.

Former Service people challenged the regimented stereotype by noting that military assignments require Service people to be adaptable to changing circumstances. They noted that military assignments frequently entailed fluid situations in which they needed to be prepared for change. Being able to respond to unexpected events was thought to be a valuable skill which employers could use.

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21 The survey asked specifically about PTSD because previous research identified this mental health condition as a particular concern of employers (see Pike 2016). However, in the focus groups, Service leavers discussed wider mental health issues which impact on people after they leave the Armed Forces.

"The fact that you've done 36 years in the Army, they'll either see you as – for want of a better word – 'an old knacker', or believe you're going to be institutionalised and you'll come out of there with a military discipline head-on, and they don't want that."

Former senior rank, online

Loyal worker: Some employers said they valued 50+ Service people as loyal workers. This perception was largely borne from an overlap of perceptions of military service and older workers. Some thought that long service in the military predicts dedicated service with the civilian employer. This perception can help 50+ Service leavers, especially when applying for jobs with organisations vexed with high turnover. However, Service leavers also thought the perception reflected a misunderstanding of military service. Those with long service said they had varied careers working in the four corners of the world on a range of assignments. After transitioning out of the Service, many 50+ Service leavers go on to have multiple careers in the civilian world.

"The idea of a commercial employer seems to be, 'They can't deal with change.' Well, they can deal with change better than your company can, quite frankly. Every two years they change their entire life, new role, (moving) their family, schools, kids, the lot."

Former officer, Bristol

Over-expectation: There was a perception amongst employers that some Service leavers, especially ex-officers had an over-expectation of the jobs which would be available to them once they left the service especially in relation to salaries. This was a view expressed by one in four employers who responded to our survey. Although Service people are on average paid less than their civilian equivalents (Office of Manpower Economics, 2015), the perception of employers is that 50+ Service leavers, especially former officers, have over-expectations of their earning potential.

A representative of a services charity made a similar point, commenting that someone (particularly an officer) who was leaving the armed services at 50+ would in most cases have risen to a fairly senior level and earning a salary which it would be difficult to replicate in civilian employment.

Service leavers reported struggling sometimes with managing employers' perceptions of their expectations. One Service leaver said that a prospective employer thought he would be willing to work below the average salary for a job because he could rely on his pension. Another said that he was asked about his salary expectations during a job interview and was uncertain about whether to pitch his expectation as too high or too low.

"I had a Lieutenant Colonel who ended up with a very good job in compliance. A very, very good job, which we pushed him into. But he turned around and said, 'I'm not going to get out of bed unless you pay me £95,000...' I looked at him after spitting out my coffee and said, 'Come on, you've got to have a reality check here.' "

Employer, London

Having poor social skills: Employers variously describe 50+ Service leavers as being potentially disruptive in the workplace describing them as bossy, aggressive, sexist and blunt. The perception of military service was that of seeing the world in binary terms rather than responding to situations in nuanced ways. This was thought to deter employers from recruiting long-serving former Service people, especially for customer service roles. Service leavers challenged this perception noting that many military roles require Service people to interact, negotiate and collaborate with people from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.

"If you were a CO [commanding officer] of a regiment you were that little despot at the top… Well, I think times have changed and, yes, you might be the guy at the top but actually, you've got to be really inclusive. You have to be alert as to how it is, what it is you need to do and whatever is going on across the whole of that particular organisation."

Former officer, London

Comradeship: 50+ Service leavers were perceived as having loyalty not only to their work and duty but also to each other. Employers said that they would be more willing to employ them in order to support teambuilding.

"If your commercial culture is very team orientated with leaderships, you are going to love military people. If you are a divisive culture, you won't like military people, because they work as teams."

Employer, Bristol

Some former Service people said that they missed the sense of community from their time in the military while others relied on their military network to secure work.

50+ SERVICE LEAVERS WERE PERCEIVED AS HAVING LOYALTY TO EACH OTHER

CONCLUSION

Long service in the Armed Forces brings skills and experience which employers say they value and can be used to meet the challenges faced by their organisations. Many employers express an interest in tapping into the training provided by the military and perceive Service leavers as being capable of meeting significant challenges. However, there are stereotypes of 50+ Service leavers, because of both their military status and age, which create barriers to them finding and securing work which they value in the civilian world. Some employers question their ability to adapt to business environments which are distant from military service.

How willing are employers to rethink perceptions of 50+ Service leavers? In the next section, we will discuss employers' willingness to challenge the assumptions which they have of 50+ Service leavers and approaches some are taking to adapting military skills sets to civilian work.

WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT

WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT FROM 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS?

In this section, we investigate the employers' point of view.

In the previous section we discussed how 50+ Service leavers see their place in the labour market; how they are perceived by employers (and how they sense those perceptions when job seeking); and what skills, experience and knowledge they consider to be valuable assets when seeking work. In this section, we investigate the employers' point of view. What are their recruitment priorities? What is the 'business case' for employers to employ 50+ Service leavers and what are reasons they may hesitate to do so? What methods do employers use to recruit and select employees and what support are some organisations providing to 50+ Service leavers in working within structures to promote themselves as the best candidates for jobs?

EMPLOYERS RECOGNISED THAT 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS HAVE IMPORTANT SKILLS

LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES

TABLE 14:

WIDER LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES FACED BY EMPLOYERS

	EASY	NEITHER	DIFFICULTY
Find staff with the right skills	46	25	27
Find staff with the right experience	44	24	31
Find staff with the right qualification	48	29	21
Find staff with the retain staff	47	25	27
Offer career opportunities to existing staff	49	27	22
Offer attractive pay and benefits to existing staff	49	28	21
Offer staff the hours which they prefer	56	27	15

EMPLOYER: 293

Employers were asked about the labour market challenges which they were facing and how they were meeting them. Several discussed problems of skills shortages, advertising for job vacancies but being unable to find candidates with the right skills or qualifications. Some employers pointed to project management, IT, science-based, engineering and logistic skills which are particularly difficult to find in candidates. In the survey, managers in small and medium-sized organisations, health and social care employers, retail and transport companies all reported difficulties in finding staff with the right skills and/or the right qualifications. In our focus group discussions, some managers expressed concerns that national economic and political factors like Brexit and tightening of immigration will further exacerbate difficulties in finding the right staff for roles.

Employers were taking a variety of approaches to address skills shortages. Some reported an increase in the amount of resources which they devoted to training employees. A manager in retail, for example, said that the company was considering expanding its use of flexible working to encourage university students to work for the firm and a manufacturer was investigating ways to retain people who were due for retirement.

A manager of a large construction firm said that his organisation was a member of the Armed Forces Covenant in order to tap into the Armed Forces as a readily available resource of skilled engineers. Another firm of management consultants is tapping into the former Service community as a source of expertise in project management and engineering. A manager in a food manufacturing company told how his company had purposefully sought recruits from former Services personnel, partly as a result of members of the senior management team coming from military backgrounds themselves.

"But it was almost solely because of the three of us. You know, we recognise the sort of raw talent that somebody could bring, and we can obviously upskill them with all the necessary, more specialist stuff that you need to work in our industry."

Employer, online

In contrast to the foregoing, an employer / occupational health services provider commented:

"I wouldn't say I was aware of any organisation that was saying, we welcome former Service people including ex-officers and that we want to support them. It's not something I've come across and I've worked with a huge number of organisations over the years."

Employer, online

EMPLOYERS HOLD POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE PEOPLE

REASONS FOR AND AGAINST EMPLOYING 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS

Employers discussed reasons why they would consider applications from 50+ Service leavers. First, as noted in the previous section, many employers hold positive perceptions of Service people generally but of those with long service in particular. They believe, for example, that people with a military background are likely to have a strong work ethic and good skills. Stereotypes can also work against 50+ Service leavers whom some employers perceive as being blunt or set in their ways.

Some Service leavers perceived the greatest barriers they faced with employers was risk aversion which was thought to happen when employers preferred to recruit within their own workplaces and in their specific sector. Some 50+ Service leavers tried to overcome this by acquiring qualifications, such as membership of professional bodies and accreditations which would be recognisable by employers. However, while these initiatives benefited some 50+ Service leavers, others said employers still valued industry-specific experience over skills acquired externally.

"It might be that you need to have lots of tickets, memberships and fellowships or chartered memberships with various specialist skills. It might be that you need to have had five or six years as a specialist in a certain field... Some of the former Service, whilst they have got bucket-loads of experience and general manager qualities, are still seen as a 'risk'."

Former officer, Bristol

Some employers, especially those which are members of the AFC, believed that employers had a social responsibility to support Service leavers into work which makes good use of their skills and capabilities.

"I believe there is a sort of moral obligation to help people who've given public service and I think organisations ought to consider how they're meeting that obligation."

Employer, online

One employer observed that the number of Armed Forces personnel is being reduced and a large cohort of older Service people are expected to be leaving the military over the next five years. He argued that the business community had a responsibility to support them in making a successful transition. Another said that every business should strive to support Service leavers.

"I don't believe there should be an armed covenant basically. I think every company should do it. You know, these servicemen and women have served our country and I believe we should support them."

Employer, Leeds

Service leavers had mixed views on employers supporting people like themselves for socially responsible reasons. On the one hand, they recognised that some long-serving Service people may need some extra support in making a career transition. On the other, some experienced what they perceived as 'virtue signalling' by the recruiting employer: for example, offering guaranteed job interviews to Service leavers but choosing to employ someone from within their own industry. They argued that employers should be persuaded to employ 50+ Service leavers because they (as employers) can benefit from making use of their skills, rather than doing so because it is 'the right thing to do.'

"The cynical comment tends to be, this is corporate social responsibility, so it's a tick the box of CSR on the part of the organisation, to show that they care about our veterans or our service children, or whatever. That's true, but we shouldn't let that cloud what can be achieved by educating organisations and breaking down barriers, and helping them understand what, as service people, we can offer them."

Former officer, Edinburgh

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION METHODS

In our survey, we asked employers to name the top three methods which they regularly used to recruit employees. 50+ Service leavers discussed their experiences with many of these methods.

TABLE 15:

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION METHODS USED BY EMPLOYERS

METHOD	% EMPLOYERS WHO SAY THIS IS WITHIN TOP THREE
Interviews	62
CVs	57
Application forms	46
Advertise internally before externally	45
External advertising	45
Company website	43
Commercial job website	31
Head hunters	30
Word of mouth	24
Psychometric testing	19
Group assessment	18
Education institutions	17
Informal	13

EMPLOYER: 328

Most organisations use interviewing as the core method of selecting people for job vacancies. In many ways, the approach is logical because through an interview, the job applicant can explain and discuss their previous work experience, skills and fit for the job. However, success in a job interview usually requires the job applicant to be able to converse in a way which is relevant to the work environment to which they are applying. Biases which favour people who are already in the trade can disadvantage people outside of it, including 50+ Service leavers.

CVS AND JOB APPLICATIONS

Employers reported using job applications and soliciting CVs from job applicants in equal numbers. With CVs, job applicants have a greater amount of discretion over the information presented on past experience and skills. Job application forms are more structured and limit the information which is provided. For example, using job application forms can prevent job applicants from passing on information which the employer might not want to know such as the applicant's date of birth. Presenting skills and capabilities in a way which stands out is critical because employers often need to sift through a large volume of applications to shortlist. Initial selections are superficial and in large organisations can be carried out through analytics software.

One of the main ways in which employers thought that Service leavers, especially those with long service, placed themselves at disadvantage, was by writing CVs aimed towards a military rather than a civilian audience. It was noted that 50+ Service leavers would often use military terms and phrases to describe their work experience. While accurate, these terms obscured the transferability of those skills.

Conversely, Service leavers often try to 'civilianise' their CVs using terms they imagine would be equivalent, which often comes across as unconvincing. One employer argued that while it might be easy to blame job applicants for poorly writing CVs, employers may share some of the blame for the mismatching of skills by being vague in their job and person specifications. He noted that 50+ Service leavers had little experience of writing CVs for civilian employers. Employers could assist 50+ Service leavers to focus on the application of their skills, knowledge and experience to the jobs they applied for, by asking competency-based questions.

Further comments are made on the use of CVs further on where we consider them along with other aspects of the job searching, which 50+ Service leavers undertake.

> "When somebody leaves the military, their CV is very much… military orientated with mostly military skills. A lot of employers look at such a CV and say, 'That's not what I'm looking for.'
>
> I think that companies should explore what that individual is capable of doing, because the military tend to undersell themselves when they leave, and they've never had a CV before. We must remember, many of them are putting a CV together for the first time at the age of 40."
>
> Employer, West Midlands

JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

Employers discussed different ways in which they advertised jobs including external advertisement, through company websites and through social media platforms like LinkedIn. Internal recruitment was used by some organisations before recruiting externally and was identified as a way to support existing staff in their careers by fostering a 'grow from within' organisational culture. Some Service leavers thought that internal recruitment methods disadvantaged people who were trying to break into a new line of work including people transitioning out of the Armed Forces.

While 50+ Service leavers welcomed the fact that employers advertised jobs externally, a common source of frustration was that some external job advertisements seemed to have been placed as a mere formality (for example, if the recruiter already had someone in mind to fill the vacancy). Some said that they felt false hope in applying for jobs for which they thought they were qualified. One Service leaver noted that he had turned down offers of roles while waiting for a response to his application for a Civil Service job which had been advertised externally. He was frustrated to find subsequently, that the job had been filled by an internal candidate.

Some employers reported using word of mouth to recruit but acknowledged that this could disadvantage people who did not belong to the social networks within which they (the employers) sought staff. Agencies were also used by some organisations. A representative of a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) noted that some employment agencies specialised in linking Service leavers with organisations which were facing skills shortages.[22]

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22 Recruitment agencies which specialise in supporting Service leavers include the Regular Forces Employment Association, Veterans UK as well as job service provision by charities like the Officers' Association and RFEA.

INTERVIEWING

Some Service leavers had apprehensions about taking part in job interviews. They worried about their ability to present their capabilities both because they lacked familiarity with the common language of the industry and because they had limited experience in taking part in interviews.

"I had no training on interviews, and I've never interviewed for a job in my career, and I'm competing with other people who have interviewed for every single job they've gone for in the last 10, 20, 30 years. I'm thinking I'm probably going to be at a significant disadvantage here. I will not interview as well."

Former officer, Edinburgh

One Service leaver said that he found the transition prospect 'terrifying'; the same individual had been a helicopter pilot, displaying skill and physical courage daily, why then did he feel terrified?

"Because, I guess, we've been institutionalised all of our lives and it's very easy to know what to do... And it's the not knowing the right behaviour at the right time... as an officer, you're always supposed to know, that's your job. So, people need to look at you and know that you're in command just by looking at you...well, I can obviously work out what clothes to wear, I can just ask somebody, but it's more than self-doubt."

Current transitioning officer, online
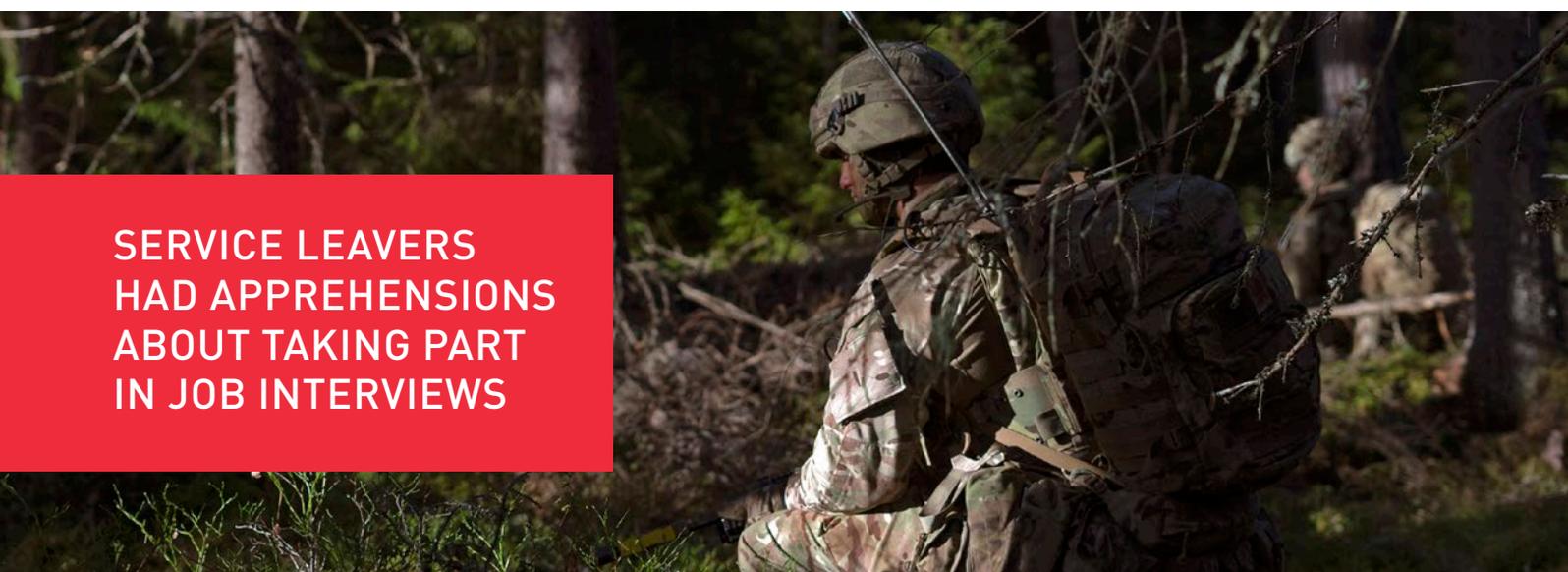
SERVICE LEAVERS HAD APPREHENSIONS ABOUT TAKING PART IN JOB INTERVIEWS

Service leavers said that they tried to overcome this disadvantage by practising interviews with friends or family or even their CTP job advisers. One Service leaver said that when preparing for an interview for a job in banking, he wrote out a list of finance terminology which he practised using in front of a mirror. Another had spent a week researching an organisation to which he was applying, including reading their annual reports, visiting the workplace, and producing what he described as a schematic of '35 bits of typed paper'. His aim was to critically assess the organisation's strategy and provide a fresh perspective on how the organisation could approach tasks differently.

"They said, 'Oh my goodness, we hadn't thought about that bit.' They said, 'Right, okay,' and at the end of it, the trick was that, without knowing it, I'd proven to them that I could do it, and that was the thing that translated from being me, as a former military officer. And the other thing I did was - I made them all tea!"

Former officer, London

The approach of this Service leaver was not without risk. Several Service leavers said that they had been rejected for jobs because, as they perceived, the employer feared that to employ someone who would be disruptive. One employer said that managers may not always value expertise Service leavers have and instead focus on challenges they may face in fitting in.

"I've been on interview panels where one of the candidates has been former Service. I have heard people on the panels say, 'But how is the organisational fit going to work?' Very often it can be because of a previous experience they've had. It is a very sweeping generalisation to say, 'Well, do we employ somebody from the military because they are going to be too rigid, too set in their ways, too whatever?' "

Employer, Hull

Only 6% of employers said that having a fresh perspective was the most important skill which they were looking for in a job applicant (with 18% saying that it was the least important). Thus, many employers (perhaps the majority) would not be persuaded by an offer from a job applicant to provide an outsider's point of view. Some Service leavers suggested that this kind of pitch should only be used when approaching employers who are looking for new strategic approaches to big problems.

Some employers said that they recognised that people outside of their respective sectors were often disadvantaged when interviewing. One way of addressing this was to conduct job interviews in a more structured way, focussing on matching skills and competencies with the requirements of the job. Others took a more informal approach to interviewing to make applicants feel more relaxed.

> "I tell them let's make it informal. And I've had guys turn up for an interview, you know, basically full suit and everything and they're like... That doesn't make them feel comfortable. So, I always say, 'Come in. You know, jeans, T-shirt, a shirt, whatever you feel comfortable in and let's have a chat.'"
>
> Employer, Leeds

One employer, who had himself had a long career in the Armed Services, shared that he had been involved in interviewing Service leavers for jobs and found his background provided valuable insight into the qualities of Services applicants. He discussed an example of a specific case;

> "...what became abundantly clear is that we had an individual in front of us who had never worked in a civilian environment, was relatively new to health and safety and was reasonably inexperienced and recently qualified. Nobody else could recognise the breadth and depth of experience that I knew he had by virtue of what he had been doing in the Royal Engineers. So cutting the long story short, I did actually persuade the particular head of department to take him on trial basis. And the guy turned out to be a great a success."
>
> Employer, online

Finally, a significant but solvable problem identified by a regional government representative was the collection of references for people who are applying for their first jobs after transitioning out of the Armed Forces. Some organisations ask referees to comment on the job applicant's experience in work similar to the job they are applying for. She noted that referencing could focus on Service leavers' capabilities rather than experience to acquire enough information on the suitability of the job applicant.

"I suppose references as well might be a bit of a difficult one because they can't always get a reference that gives a lot of detail. It's quite often just, 'Yes, they were in the forces. This is when they were here and this is when they left.' So, they might have to be a bit flexible about character references rather than just the employer references."

North East LEP

CONCLUSION

Employers generally shared positive views of 50+ Service leavers. Those with whom we spoke expressed a willingness to recruit people who were transferring mid-career out of the Armed Forces. This willingness was not confined to employers who were already committed Service leaver recruiters (for example as members of the AFC) but included employers who claimed little or no prior experience of employing Service leavers. Constraints in employing 50+ Service leavers included recruitment practices which favoured expediency in finding a suitable candidate. Recruitment and selection methods which prioritise previous experience in the sector can obscure the skills and competencies of those who are seeking to join mid-career, including 50+ Service leavers. Cultural and language differences between Service and civilian organisations can sometimes prevent employers from recognising 50+ Service leavers' potential. Organisations with skills shortages and those which need to look expansively when recruiting into their organisations are among those most likely to find ways of adapting military skills to the needs of the business.

TRANSITIONING FROM THE ARMED FORCES

Leaving a workplace can be daunting for most people who are making a mid-career transition. It can be a particularly significant turning point for somebody leaving the Armed Forces with up to thirty-seven years of service. This section will discuss 50+ Service leavers experiences in transitioning out of the Armed Forces; factors which led to their decision to leave the Service; what they are doing to prepare for the transition and what their expectations are post-transition.

TIMING OF TRANSITIONS

We asked Service leavers what factors had influenced the timing of their transitions out of the Armed Forces. Respondents were permitted to give more than one reason.

TABLE 16:

REASONS FOR LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES

REASON FOR LEAVING THE ARMED FORCES	% OFFERING AS A REASON
Could draw a full pension	43
Was told would have to leave	28
Wanted to try something new	22
Dissatisfied with promotion prospects	17
Dissatisfied with working life	16
Completed commission	13
Had a career opportunity outside the military	13
Difficult work relationships	8
Family reasons	8
Wanted less stressful work	7
Want fewer hours	6
Left for a health reason	4
Left due to stress/PTSD	3
Dissatisfied with salary	2
Wanted less physically demanding work	1

SERVICE LEAVERS: 200

THEY DID NOT FEEL DESPERATE TO FIND THE FIRST JOB AVAILABLE

Service leavers said they had decided to leave the Armed Forces for a variety of reasons. A significant pull factor was that many of them start receiving their military pension at the age of 55 (and some start receiving it earlier). The age range of 50 to 55 was described as a window in which people planned to exit. After the age of 55, it was reported that continuing would be financially inefficient because pension entitlements no longer increase with continued service. Having access to a pension was thought to be an important benefit which could smooth the transition to civilian work. Former Service people said that the pension by itself was not enough to live on, especially if they had a mortgage to pay off or school fees for which they were responsible. However, it did provide a stable income which provided a cushion so that they did not feel desperate to find the first job available when leaving the Armed Forces.

"The pension isn't enough for me to survive on, but it will be good for bridging between jobs. I just very much got the impression if you wanted to break out of defence, you needed to find somewhere that was prepared to take a risk on you to give you a chance."

Former officer, Bristol

Service leavers said that they had decided to leave the Armed Forces after reaching a career plateau. As one former Service person described, each time an appointment or posting came to an end, he would weigh up the opportunities available with a new appointment against embarking on a new career in the civilian world. Many of his colleagues had left the Armed Forces when they were in their thirties and forties when the appointments they were being offered became lateral rather than upward. He had decided to stay until his fifties because each new appointment represented a promotion. His final appointment however represented, in his mind, a demotion which made him feel that the time was right to transition out of the Armed Forces.

A former senior rank said that her decision to leave the Service was brought forward by a redundancy. At the end of an appointment in her early fifties, she was considering taking one more appointment but decided to take a redundancy offer. While taking redundancy left her financially better off, she did not feel mentally or emotionally prepared to start a new career in the civilian world.

"Obviously because I volunteered for redundancy, my hand was forced slightly. I had six months. Even then I didn't quite grasp the reality of my situation - it was just that I thought, 'If I have to wait another six months...' you just start to really lose impetus in your current role."

Former senior rank, online

Another ex-senior rank said that he felt that he was pushed out of service after suffering an injury at work. He had been demoted because of physical limitations. When his commanding officer needed to make personnel reductions, he was encouraged to take medically related discharge.

"My desk officer was very honest with me. He said, '[NAME],' he said, 'I'd like to keep you in the Army, but why should I keep you in the Army when there are people who are more able-bodied than you are and I would have to discharge them?' He said, 'The circumstances are against you. We're going to medically discharge you.' "

Former senior rank, online

One Service leaver noted that some people decided to leave the Service after suffering burnout. Burnout may come as a result of a traumatic experience in service, an injury or problem with a senior or colleague. He said that there was a term used to describe those who left because of burnout: the 'Seven clicks to freedom' cohort. Once they found themselves at a turning point, they started the paperwork for leaving and gradually began to disengage.

Not everyone reported reaching a career plateau. Three of the Service leavers whom we interviewed held posts in the Armed Forces which were the same or broadly similar to the jobs they would later perform in civilian employment. Some Service people said that their last appointments were their most fulfilling ones and that they were pleased to have been leaving the Armed Forces on an upward trajectory. However, being engaged in a role which has high responsibility, although rewarding, can bring problems if it detracts the Service leaver from planning towards their transition to civilian work.

One Service leaver said that his last posting took him overseas to manage a large project. He took the role not only because he found it exciting, but also because he anticipated gaining transferable skills and experience, like managing a large budget, which civilian employers would value. He did not anticipate the difficulty he then had in accessing the support from organisations like CTP in making his transition out of the military. As he was outside the UK, he was not able to make use of the offered services, such as employability training, which would have helped him to write a CV and prepare for a job interview.

CHANGE IN FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

Some Service leavers said that a change in family circumstances resulted in a decision to leave the Armed Forces. One person who was currently transitioning said that he had been obliged to leave because he and his wife needed to live closer to both of their sets of parents who needed more care. He said that all of the prospects for his next posting were overseas, and he worried about being stationed abroad if his or his wife's parents had an emergency.

Conversely, an employer reported that some of the 50+ former Service people he was recruiting had decided to leave the Service because they had young families to support. They had decided to leave with enough time to embark on a new civilian career which they could sustain until retirement age when financial responsibilities would start to reduce.

"They are about to leave their position but sometimes they say, 'I've got to carry on doing what I do.' It seems that Service life is part of their psyche. They may also have kids that are still in school. We see that quite a lot as well."

Employer, London

Some Service leavers said that their decision to leave the Armed Forces was at the request of a partner who may want a change in family circumstances. One person who was leaving the Armed Forces was doing so because he had been stationed overseas unaccompanied for his current appointment and he had promised his wife that they would return to his hometown.

"Because it's unaccompanied and I've done that for the last nine years, there's come a time when I need to get back, to be with my family. I could probably keep this job until I died, if I am honest, but my wife has basically said, 'Right, old man, it's time to come home.' And she's never bleated, so fair play to her, it's time to come home. So, that's why I'm choosing to resettle, a new career path, so to speak."

Current transitioning senior rank, online

EXPERIENCING HARDSHIP

Although none of the focus group participants had experienced this, representatives of stakeholder groups like Help the Heroes and Poppy Scotland noted that Service people who are involuntarily discharged often find it particularly difficult to find a civilian job both because the transition is unplanned and because they have a dismissal on their employment record. According to the MOD, there is a state programme to support hard-to-employ Service leavers into work.[23]

Representatives of Help for Heroes and Combat Stress also noted that those who are 'Wounded, Injured and Sick' (WIS) have difficulties building civilian careers. When WISs leave the Service, they seldom start looking for work, as their first priority is to manage a health problem or injury. By the time they feel able to look for work, they may have had an extended period of economic inactivity. Finding work with an interrupted career, often outdated skills and a health problem, which many employers would be concerned about taking on, can often make it difficult for WISs to secure sustainable work.

"People who are leaving against their will are at increased risk of not working longer-term. Leaving with a mental health difficulty, evidence shows this, you're more likely to be unemployed three or four years later as well."

Combat Stress

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23   Details on the support for people who leave through compulsory termination can be found here: https://www.ctp.org.uk/assets/x/57613.

TRYING SOMETHING NEW

Not all Service leavers with whom we spoke felt that they were pushed out of the Service. According to the survey, 22% of 50+ Service leavers said that they left because they wanted to try something new and 13% said that they left because they had a new work opportunity in the civilian world. One Service leaver said that he was offered an operations director role in a start-up company before he had left the Armed Forces. Another said he had been planning for years a career in adventure tourism. A third said that she was planning to take 'a year out.'

> "I don't know what job I am going to do next, but I think a lot about the next chapter of my life and have been for some time now…. My current plan is that I'm not going to go into a job when I leave at least initially. I think after that, yes I will, but I will have a year where I just go on a course, have a period of breathing and then look at something."
>
> Current transitioning officer, online

One problem which some 50+ Service leavers noted in making a transition was the period of notice which they needed to give their commanding unit. Some people who were in the process of transitioning said that were being turned down for jobs because they had a year or more until they were able to fully leave the Armed Forces. One said that he was offered a job for when he was fully discharged but then found it had gone to someone else.

TABLE 17:

HOW LONG WILL IT/DID IT TAKE YOU TO SECURE YOUR FIRST JOB?

	EX-SERVICE	CURRENT SERVING
Secured or expect to secure employment before left military	53	19
Within a month	9	13
Between 1 and 3 months	12	29
Between 3 and 6 months	13	29
Between 6 months and 1 year	4	6
Between 1 year and 2 years	4	3
Longer than 2 years	1	0
Still haven't found a job	4	-

CURRENT SERVING: 31

EX-SERVING: 163

TABLE 18:

AND HOW MANY JOBS DO YOU EXPECT/DID YOU APPLY FOR BEFORE SECURING YOUR FIRST JOB?

	EX-SERVICE	CURRENT SERVING
Zero	10	0
One	25	3
Two to ten	41	52
Eleven to fifty	24	45
Over fifty	11	0

CURRENT SERVING: 29

EX-SERVING: 163

"It's 12 months long…(the notice period) They told me they wouldn't get a replacement, knowing that nobody is indispensable. Well, they didn't think I was indispensable because they were kicking my fat arse out."

Current transitioning
senior rank, online

Several Service leavers said that transitions out of the Service should be more flexible to allow people who find a job early in the transition process to leave in order to secure it.

HOW CONFIDENT ARE 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS OF SECURING WORK WHICH THEY VALUE?

In the survey, we asked 50+ Service people who were currently transitioning, how long they anticipated that it would take them to secure their first jobs. We also asked former Service people how long it actually took them to secure their first jobs. According to the survey, just over half of 50+ Service leavers said that they had secured work before they had completely left the Armed Forces and three quarters said that they had found a job within three months of leaving the service. By contrast, about two-thirds of people who were transitioning expected that it would take them at least a month to secure their first job. We also asked the two groups how many jobs they expected to apply for (or in some cases, had applied for) before landing their first job. Most current serving people said they expected to submit between two and fifty job applications. Over a third of former Service people reported securing a job with their first job application, but a substantial minority (one in nine) had not been able to secure a job after more than fifty job applications.

22% OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS SAID THAT THEY LEFT BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO TRY SOMETHING NEW

People who are transitioning out of the Armed Forces expressed apprehension about looking for work. Some expected to struggle and worried about struggling to find work. One said that, although he is generally excited about the prospect of embarking on a new career, he also had fears of not being able to secure work in his chosen field.

"And I'm also a little bit aware that I'm waking up each morning, thinking, 'Fuck, nobody actually wants me.' It's getting a little bit sad and depressing, like that. And I think that's going to be getting worse as I get further on, and maybe past my actual leave date."

Current transitioning officer, online

Transitioning out of the Armed Forces can, therefore, present a paradox. Being offered a job early in the transition process can often be problematic because the Service leaver needs to complete a lengthy period of notice. However, the longer it takes to successfully land a job, the more anxious the Service leaver feels about being unable to find a job.

Representatives of stakeholder organisations said that they are providing support to manage the anxiety of job search. For example, Hull City Council has set up a one-stop hub for Service leavers to find help for issues which they face including financial concerns, family issues and employment. It was noted that one goal of the hub was to provide Service leavers with a venue for them to support one another.

"Why don't you go to the Hub? They'll be able to put you in touch with someone that can maybe have a chat with you about it. Just to know they are not the only ones that are going through it as well, because there is sometimes a stigma, definitely with the mental health thing. They don't want to admit they've got anything wrong, or they don't know where to go to if they do realise they do."

Employer, Hull

We spoke to many 50+ Service leavers to who were excited about the prospect of starting a new career. Starting a new career was seen as a chance to embark on a new adventure or to take a new turning point.

"I'm looking forward to leaving. It's a new challenge, isn't it? I'm at that age now where I'm two-thirds through my life, my expected life, and a different challenge while I'm still fit enough to try something different is my plan."

Current transitioning officer, York

CAREER AMBITIONS

50+ Service leavers had different views on what they wanted to do after leaving the Armed Forces. We asked people who had left the Armed Forces to rank the priorities they had when looking for their first civilian jobs. Table 19 shows the priorities which ranked at the top and bottom three.

TABLE 19:

MOST IMPORTANT AND LEAST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES WHEN LOOKING FOR THEIR FIRST JOB AFTER TRANSITION OUT OF THE ARMED FORCES

	TOP THREE	BOTTOM THREE
Interesting work	75	9
Good use of skills	67	22
Feeling valued	52	35
Good salary	45	33
Work which is close to home	32	49
Work which helps others	25	51
Flexible working hours	20	58

FORMER SERVICE: 163

Most 50+ Service leavers wanted work which is interesting, makes good use of their skills and makes them feel valued by their employers. Having a good salary was important to many older Service leavers, especially if they had expenses like a mortgage or tuition fees. However, the consensus of both those who were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces and those who had already done so was that the highest priority was to find work which is intrinsically rewarding.

"I want to find something which satisfies me; something which I think is a good use of my skills, and which interests me. I need something that's going to get me up every day and which is going to be satisfying in its own right. Pay is important, I don't want to do it for free, I've still got financial commitments with my kids."

Current transitioning Officer, York

The meaning of 'interesting work' varied between focus group participants. Some Service leavers wanted to embark on a career which was entirely different from anything they had done previously. One ex-officer said that when he left the Armed Forces, he had decided not to become a military consultant, even though many of his contemporaries had found work with businesses in the defence industry as a 'natural progression'. Instead, he had chosen to join the voluntary sector. His aim was to apply his project management skills to supporting third sector organisations in mobilising and motivating volunteer workers.

Some Service leavers said that they wanted to reduce their workload after leaving the Armed Forces. Therefore, they were not necessarily looking for work which made full use of their skills. One Service leaver said that many of his colleagues were being encouraged to take skilled jobs but wanted to take on low-pressure roles, at least initially after transitioning to civilian work.

"If they've been a Warrant Officer, or something of that nature, generally you'll say to them, 'What do you want to do when you leave?' They'll say, 'I wouldn't mind being a postman,' or, 'I wouldn't mind being a trolley assistant at a supermarket.' Why? They give reasons such as, ' I do not want the pressure anymore', or ' I do not want the speed and pace of being middle-management anymore. I just want something that's a no-brainer.'"

Former senior rank, Leeds

A manager of a logistics firm said that her organisation employs a driver with management experience whom she encouraged to accept a team management role. She said that he has told her that he prefers being a driver, spending his time travelling around the country, and does not want to take on the stress of managing staff.

"Because of the skills that he had and his experience in the military, we imagined he would be useful in a management role, but he decided that he just wanted to be a driver and that's what he wanted to be. He wanted to drive a truck. So, I keep speaking to him and saying, you know, 'Are you still happy?' 'Yes, I'm happy.' But it's about making sure that door is not closed. If there is a vacancy, there is somebody there that has transferable skills."

Employer, Leeds

Some former Service people said that they were looking for work which was similar to a role they had performed in the military. They thought that looking for work in the defence-related industry was the best way to find work which makes good use of their skills and experience. Some said they were focusing on applying for jobs in the civil service, or more specifically in the MOD, both of which they felt were similar structurally to the armed forces, and would demand skills which they had gained in the military. In some instances, the choice of future career seemed an obvious development out of a specialist role in the Services, as in the case of an officer who was a consultant in intensive care medicine and had spent the past fifteen years working in a National Health Service hospital, albeit as a regular soldier going on exercise or operations. After transition he would be working in the same hospital, doing more or less the same work. In another case, an officer had been a Director of Music and seemed well placed with excellent connections, to continue working in the same field.

Many 50+ Service leavers said that they were unsure of the work they wanted to find once they left the Armed Forces. They had only rudimentary plans for their post-transition career with a vague idea of what they would like to do but were unsure about what kind of jobs they should focus on looking for. One ex-officer has taken on career counselling roles. He described the experience of some people he supports as the 'Spice Girls' dilemma.

"You need to have your Spice Girls moment. 'Tell me what you want, what you really, really want.' And a lot of them don't know…They say to you, 'What do you want?' And you say, 'I don't know.'"

Former officer, Leeds

His view was that support services such as those provided by CTP should not simply focus on career advice (for example, how to write a CV or take part in an interview), but should also offer career guidance, to help Service leavers identify work which would suit their capabilities and aspirations. He argued that many of the people with whom he worked, adopted scattergun approaches to applying for jobs. This was because they were unsure about what they could do and wanted to do. As a result, they applied for jobs which they may have been reluctant to take on.

Some of the employers with whom we spoke said that they recognised that many former Services people were unsure of their future civilian careers. Accordingly, they provided opportunities for Armed Forces leavers, easing them into roles which provided some flexibility in future career trajectories. A West Midlands logistics firm, for example, promoted driving as a bridge job, which Service leavers could do while planning their long-term futures. Drivers were provided with flexible work schedules to allow them to take part in retraining and job searching. If they made a successful transition to another job, they were given the opportunity to come back to work for the logistics firm if needed.

"Most of them haven't got an idea and that's the reason why they choose driving… When I speak to them, whether driving's their plan A or sometimes their plan Z, it just gives them another option."

Employer, West Midlands

Some 50+ Service leavers said that they had decided to try portfolio working immediately after transitioning out of the Armed Forces in order to experience a variety of roles. (Portfolio working typically embraces a range of small jobs, paid and unpaid roles and may include self-employment or acting as a consultant for a number of organisations.) This kind of work pattern has been posited as an arrangement which would suit some older workers who want to gradually reduce their workloads as they transition into retirement. Some 50+ Service leavers said that they were planning portfolio work in order to maintain flexibility, as they settled into civilian work.

"My dream area would be, like, a portfolio career and, to be fair, I've been taken on as an associate with a couple of companies. It's actually just getting the work to do, them getting the work, really."

Former officer, Edinburgh

CONTINUED LINKS WITH MILITARY SERVICE

A frequent theme of discussions with Service leavers was the desire to return to military service. According to our survey, 41% of 50+ Service leavers had at least occasionally thought of returning to the military after transitioning to civilian work. 10% of 50+ Service leavers have remained as reservists.

TABLE 20:

WHAT WOULD PERSUADE YOU TO STAY IN OR RETURN TO THE ARMED FORCES?

	CURRENT SERVING	EX-SERVICE
Promotion opportunity	39	5
A new commission	21	18
Change in circumstance	30	8
Change in family circumstances	24	3
Worries about career prospects in the civilian world	12	15
Worries about finance	24	14
Feeling lonely outside military	9	20
Missed living and working in military	18	42

CURRENT SERVING: 33

EX-SERVING: 66

Both current serving and former Service people were asked respectively what would persuade them to stay in and return to the Armed Forces. Both groups said that hardship such as a change in circumstances or worries about finances would be an important reason for returning.

One individual had first joined the Army in 1984 and left in 1994. He spent sixteen years in civilian employment before being made redundant - rejoining the Army as a full-time reservist. Whilst his current contract was due to end in December 2020, he hoped to gain a further contract taking him to the age of 65 or 67.

"I needed a job at short notice being made redundant at the tender age of 48 with a mortgage and children at school and all that sort of thing in a recession... So I was grateful for a job, I meant to stay two years, and it was sort of nice being back in, I suppose, and nine years later, I'm still here."

Current transitioning officer, online

For people who had not fully transitioned out, a good career offer like a promotion opportunity or new posting would be important. However, for former Service people, the main reason for wanting to return was that they experienced a feeling of loneliness or missed military life.

Some of the 50+ Service leavers we spoke with talked about aspects of military life which they missed. A significant part of military service discussed was comradeship. Many former Service people said that they missed the sense of community and support which they had in Service life. One described civilian work as 'dog eat dog' and remembered his time in the military as a time when he could depend on colleagues.

"What I do miss sometimes ... is the can-do mentality of the military, where if you just need something doing, people will gather around and do it. Here, people are like, 'Well, I can't. I've got to go now.' You just have to adapt to it."

Former senior rank, online

Although many Service leavers reported missing life in the Armed Forces, in practice few return to regular service. Links with the military community are however maintained in different ways. First, around one in ten 50+ Service leavers, we surveyed said that they had become reservists after transitioning out of regular service. Some described being a reservist as a bridge between military service and civilian work. They were able to continue in the roles that they had undertaken before transitioning out of the Services, albeit in a more limited or different capacity. One current serving person saw being a reservist as a way to reduce the shock of transitioning to civilian employment which would likely involve significant changes in her work environment and routine.

"But if that reservist role goes... there are plenty of other things. For probably two or three days a week, that will be the weaning off process. I don't know. I've known plenty of people to do that."

Current transitioning officer, York

Another former Service person said that reservist work was an important source of work especially for Service leavers who either have difficulty in finding work or experience a job loss. He noted that being a reservist could be akin to having an insurance policy to protect against unemployment.

"There are plenty of opportunities for quite a lot of the ex-regulars to go and join the reserve forces. Some want to take that route and others don't, but that is always open to them. There is always full-time reserve service where a set of jobs come up which are, more or less, full-time. They can look at those and they can then ease themselves into some more employment with the MOD, as a reserve soldier."

Former senior rank, Leeds

Some 50+ Service leavers said that they had become reservists in order to have access to training which could help them secure skilled jobs in the civilian job market. One 50+ ex-officer said that he was a reservist because he was able to take new assignments which he found interesting and rewarding, including with NATO.

In order to maintain reservist status, Service leavers need to be employed by organisations which are supportive of people with such responsibilities, for example by giving them time off for training, exercises and operational deployments. One of the main reasons employers gave for supporting reservists was that it helped them to attract Service leavers as employees into their organisation.

"Well, the other thing that we do is to support reservists. So, at transition point, some people don't necessarily want to fully escape the military and their military ethos. Instead, they may want to keep in touch with being part of the military. So we have a few people who are reservists… and we support them."

Employer, Leeds

CONCLUSION

Transitioning out of the Armed Forces is a major turning point for most Service leavers, but can be especially daunting for those who are leaving after long service. Most of those who are currently transitioning out of the Armed Forces are positive and even have a sense of excitement in preparing for their civilian careers. However, they also have some apprehension. Many expressed uncertainty about what they wanted to do in their second career. Coping techniques which are adopted may include looking for bridgework, considering portfolio work and maintaining links with the military including by remaining reservists. In the next section, we will discuss job searching strategies which 50+ Services leavers say that they are following to secure permanent work.

MANY EXPRESSED UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT THEY WANTED TO DO IN THEIR SECOND CAREER

JOB SEEKING

How did 50+ Service leavers set about finding jobs in civilian life? In this section we will examine their strategies and practical approaches, bearing in mind that well-established policies and practices are available to support the transitioning of Services personnel. Transitioning out of the military is supported by a comprehensive programme of support, delivered with differing levels of intensity and detail according to time served in the services.

In our workshops and interviews we sought to establish as far as possible, the experiences (both positive and negative) of 50+ Service leavers in job searching and the approaches they adopted to help them find jobs in their transition to civilian employment. Former Service people were asked to assess the skills which they had when they first left the Armed Forces.

TABLE 21:

THINKING BACK TO WHEN YOU FIRST LEFT THE ARMED FORCES, HOW GOOD OR BAD WERE THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS YOU HAD?

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NEITHER	BAD	VERY BAD
CV writing skills	13	45	21	17	4
Performance in a job interview	19	50	20	10	1
Social networking	11	35	30	18	6
IT skills	24	48	24	4	0
Career planning	9	36	41	12	2
Ability to negotiate pay	3	21	32	34	10

FORMER SERVICE: 164

CV WRITING

The CV is used by employers as a tool to support their recruitment of personnel and any weaknesses may mean failure to choose the best person for the job. However, it is also used by the job seeker to show their capabilities and experience in a competitive employment market. A convincing CV can help the job seeker to secure an interview and, hopefully, gain a job offer. While it can give a strong impression to an employer for a particular post, it can also help the candidate to recognise gaps in their suitability for a career move.

50+ Service leavers recognised that when employers short-list, they spend a short amount of time looking at each CV. They realised generally that it was important for the CV to present their skill, knowledge and experience in a concise way which could capture the attention of the person responsible for short-listing. Some noted that they found that there were no hard rules for writing a CV and that the style of CV often depended on the job which was being advertised. For example, while many job advisers recommend limiting a CV length to two sides of A4, some employers expected more detailed information on skills and experience. While some employers were only interested in the competencies which the job applicant had, others also wanted to know about their interests and passions for a job. One Service leaver said that the CV which he used to secure a job in the voluntary sector would be very different if he were applying for a position in a bank. In the former, his aim was to convince his prospective employer that he saw the job as a mission in which he could help others, while he expected that the latter would only be interested in his qualifications and competencies.

In the survey, one in five 50+ Service leavers struggled in writing CVs. One focus group participant had commissioned a professional service to write his CV for him but did not feel that the organisation added any value to what he had written. Another had sought feedback from organisations he had applied to, especially when he was not shortlisted for jobs for which he thought he was a good fit. Those who successfully found jobs which they valued pointed to two factors which helped them in writing a CV: First, those who were focused on a sector and/or occupational role said they produced a generic CV which could be used for multiple applications for jobs which had common characteristics. It was thought that being focused on their career direction helped them develop ways of presenting themselves which could catch the attention of employers for whom they wanted to work. Second, experience in the job market was thought to be crucial to writing a CV well. One former Service person from senior rank who had made multiple job changes since leaving the Armed Forces said that the CV he uses now is different from the kind of CV which many Service leavers present.

"There was an officer that phoned the other day...He sent me his CV, two pages of what he's done in the military. There was zero on there that I would put to my boss to say, 'Employ this person.' I want to know what the value was of any projects you've been working on. What did you do? What was your budget?... Risk, all that kind of stuff. There was nothing on there at all. That's just the business world."

Former senior rank, London

Service leavers commented on the necessity of having a CV that reflected their range of career experience and skills, tailored in such a way as to appeal to a civilian employer. Some were, however, uncertain as to how best to pitch their skills and experience – a feeling of venturing into the unknown was apparent in some conversations.

"I used the career transition workshop and found it very good, but not for me. I have become well qualified and followed lots of courses. I can write a CV, but the tricky bit is that you want someone to hold your hand and say, 'That's alright lad you can do it.' "

Current transitioning officer, London

Some participants expressed the view that the CV alone was not enough and mentioned that a mentor, work club or What's App group made up of other transitioning personnel of similar age range, could provide a useful prop in terms of technical guidance and moral support, both in writing a CV and broader approaches to navigating the employment market.

CUSTOMISING CVS

While relatively few officer participants expressed deeper concerns about the task of writing a CV, there was some hesitancy among senior rank participants. Some failed to understand the need for customising a CV and writing a bespoke letter of application to a named person or prospective employer. On the other hand, some participants clearly did understand this necessity to tweak CVs to suit specific job applications and employers.

"That's possibly the way I might be going…, I've just tweaked it again because I was using a generic CV before … But maybe the best approach for certain jobs, because I've got a sort of generic one, is take out the bits that are not relevant."

Current transitioning officer, London

Another had learned that it was sometimes desirable to present less than a complete employment history in order to meet the requirement of relevance and brevity in a CV.

"I've tweaked that to try and fit the job requirements of a civil service job. So without lying, I am leaving some things out but still telling the truth, everything (relevant which) I did is in there, I am trying to meet what they want and trying to do it in the format they were asking for as well."

Current transitioning officer, online

EMPLOYERS CAN STRUGGLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS PRESENT THEIR MILITARY ACQUIRED SKILLS

Use of military terminology and language in CV writing was sometimes seen by employers to be a problematic factor. This issue was recognised by some 50+ transitioning personnel.

"But the experience is, you know, we speak a different language. So, I am trying to make sure that my description of what I have done makes sense to somebody in terms of its depth and breadth and complexity etc. That's the challenge, in what has to be a fairly pithy document."

Current transitioning officer, online

Participants in our employer workshops echoed this point of view.

"…I spoke to a lot of people who were potentially leaving the armed forces. I tried to explain to them that as an employer, we were looking for transferrable skill sets. But some CVs which they brought with them were incomprehensible. So, what I was reading was like something in a completely different language. I had absolutely no idea what they'd done."

Employer, London

EMPLOYER UNDERSTANDING OF MILITARY CVS

Some employers thought that the problem of using incomprehensible language was particularly noticeable among older Service leavers.

> "I think the problem of obscure language is a big problem for military people right the way across the board. But certainly for the older element... Some people's CVs turn up and... and it's completely in military speak... we know what it means but unless you've got the background, it is in gobbledygook."
>
> Employer, London

Employers did not all agree that the problem was the fault of the Service leavers. Some seemed ready to make allowances, try to understand military jargon and help Service leavers to pitch their experience more simply. One Service leaver took the view that the problem came down to a lack of perception by employers.

> "...When somebody leaves the military, their CV is very militarily orientated with mostly military skills.
>
> A lot of people will look at such a CV and say, 'That's not what I'm looking for.' However, I think that companies should explore what that individual is able and capable of doing."
>
> Former officer, London

SELLING THEMSELVES SHORT

Some employers believed that Service leavers ran the risk of selling themselves short because they did not know the buzz-words and vogue phrases that employers might be looking for.

> "The military tend to undersell themselves when they leave, and they've never had a CV before. So, they're putting a CV together for the first time at the age of 40..."
>
> Employer, West Midlands

Some of transitioning Service leavers were aware of this problem too and felt that it needed to be overcome in the CV. Discussions touched on the sorts of things a CV didn't generally cover, but which employers should bear in mind in relation to an applicant from a military background. The following quote illustrates this point.

> "It might be that he's a better candidate for being in the Army because he's got his own little network that supports things that this employer might want. I think some of it is putting it down to your CV as well. When you get your CV out there perhaps you should be sure that you have written something along the lines of, 'I am willing and prepared, and I've got a network behind me to work away, work weekends and work later. Whatever courses you want me to do, I'll do and I will be more open to new ideas as well."
>
> Former senior rank,
> Carlton Barracks

HAVING INSIDE KNOWLEDGE OF A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER

Some Service leavers highlighted the need for inside knowledge and understanding of what might be expected of an applicant, how their CVs and applications should generally be structured and who the key contacts might be in an organisation.

"For me, getting advice on who I need to talk to and the fact that my covering letter needs to structured differently, are important. The fact that I am undertaking a career transition means my CV needs to be structured differently. I am applying to work in a charity so I have to start my covering letter by demonstrating a belief and passion for that charity."

Current transitioning
officer, London

For some 50+ Service leavers, the mysteries of seeking employment in 'civvy-street' included the challenge of persuading someone to offer them the chance to prove their capabilities. It sometimes seemed that too much faith was being placed in the influence of a written CV, and perhaps somewhat naively, some imagined that if they could 'only get their CV right,' they would be in there with a 'decent shot.'

Some comments suggested that a more comprehensive analysis was in reality needed of how practically to gain employment at or after the age of 50. Examples which emerged included the need for strategically selected and targeted applications and making use of networks.

CV SUPPORT FROM CAREER TRANSITION PARTNERSHIP

The CTP workshops were in general reported upon favourably, though some participants were less than satisfied. In the survey, three in four said that CTP workshops were good or very good. One focus group participant reported that he was roundly discouraged from applying for positions in the NGO sector because his CV was 'not good enough,' even though he had already received good feedback and a job offer on the same CV from a large charity with which he had been placed as a work experience posting.

Another former officer commented on what he felt was a misleading over-emphasis on brevity in CVs, the aim of producing a two-page CV being unnecessarily stressed in his view. In contradiction, he had been informed, both by potential employers and agencies, that the length of a CV was less important than ensuring that it covers the full range of work experience he had held. Another workshop participant observed that inclusion of specific words or phrases in a CV could make a difference if CVs were sifted for keywords by computer. Overall, while it would seem that the basic elements of what a CV should comprise and how it should be laid out, are being correctly conveyed to Service leavers, additional forms of support might be usefully given. More flexible and intelligent use of CVs would seem to be particularly important.

JOB SEARCHES

Participants varied in the degree to which they had developed strategic approaches to job searching. This was particularly evident in their formulation of ideas of the sorts of roles they should focus on looking for in civilian employment. In some cases, participants seemed vague about a future career choice, with only impressionistic preferences for particular working conditions, roles at certain levels (e.g. executive or board) or geographic locations, despite being fairly close to leaving their forces roles. The following comments illustrate the rather vague and hopeful, 'something will turn up' approach which some adopted.

"To be honest, I think I'd quite like manufacturing on one side of it, or—so logistics to do with manufacturing, equipment manufacturing would be good... I've looked at charitable organisations, and you know, National Trust type jobs because I've got a range across the... it's supply chain logistics facilities I suppose... and then you've always got the leadership foundation and I've already got project management qualifications and skills on that. So it's a blend, somehow I blend those together I think in terms of that."

Current transitioning officer, online

Given the long lead time most had up to the point of voluntary departure, one may have imagined that this would not be the case, but the explanation offered in some instances was that their forces roles had been "full-on" with too little time in practice to seriously contemplate their own futures.

Some Service leavers had formulated plans for building on specialist military experience, in some instances, having carefully pieced together the necessary array of qualifications and experience for a specific role. Individuals in this category made good use of all the training opportunities open to them and often followed courses that led to professional qualifications that would support specific roles in civilian employment. In contrast, others seemed to have assembled experience with no particular end role in mind, and while feeling confident and about their skills, they wrestled with dilemmas over job choices on transition. The following quote from a warrant officer near to completion of 40 years' service, captures the situation facing such personnel:

"My plans vary according to what sort of mood I am in on the day. I can't retire – I can't afford to do so. I will need to work to 62 at least. I have got a few plans but I have reached no firm decisions. I may go into the project management business. However, I am also a qualified trainer. I have got a few options, but I have got to be honest, I have been quite worried about it since April of this year."

Current transitioning senior rank, online

For such personnel, as for many people in civilian employment, some form of adult career guidance around the 45 plus age range would seem to be a useful idea. The range of opportunities for military personnel to undergo development and advance their learning seems impressive, but better use may be made of these if individuals took advantage of independent career and life guidance.

Many of our participants used social media to search for jobs. While forces life appears to foster certain kinds of personal networks, some of our participants felt that these did not particularly support the exploration of opportunities beyond the military sphere. Those who used such informal networks argued that they were a useful way of 'putting themselves about,' and represented a resource for older people who shared military background.

"I have very much used the old boy network. I have got two friends who have looked at my CV, looked at LinkedIn, and passed that on internally."

Current transitioning
officer, online

50+ SERVICE LEAVERS SEEMED VAGUE ABOUT A FUTURE CAREER CHOICE

USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Many jobs in civilian life are secured through informal approaches and networks; those who advise older job seekers frequently stress the importance of using networks. Most of our Service leavers appeared to be tuned in to the value of networks, either those supported via Linked In or another social media platform or less formal networks centred on a particular specialism. One problem, however, was that Service leavers' networks (which may have been built up over a period of years) did not necessarily include contacts who may have been able to support them in branching out into civilian employment. One in four of the survey respondents reported having poor social networks.

A second problem was how to use networks. Participants recognised the importance of networking but some were not clear how to go about developing and making the best use of network contacts. Some saw this haziness as a key distinction between the commercial world and Service life. As one observer put it, in the Armed Forces the system works 'by the book,' whilst in contrast in the commercial world, there is less structure and organisation. Absence of the level of order and organisation which one finds in the military placed greater emphasis on the individual's web of contacts and communication.

> "In the commercial world...they are great networkers. They have no choice. Actually, they network like crazy. Everyone has a way to work around the system."
>
> Former officer, Bristol

Forces people were, supposedly, less adapted to networking and less conversant with networking techniques than people in civilian employment.

Some former services personnel expressed reserve about adopting persistence and what some described as 'pushiness' that may be associated with networking. Engaging with people one did not know, seemed forced and artificial and, according to one observer, left one open to people falling back on their preconceptions.

> "If you engage with people you haven't necessarily known... They often just fall back on a preconception of what you do and what strengths you have, and what skills you do or don't have."
>
> Former officer, London

A problem identified in using networks for job hunting was associated with the issue of availability for work. Given that most serving personnel leaving at or after the age of fifty are subject to a planned transition programme lasting up to two years, it did not seem realistic to be making proactive approaches to employers in one's network of contacts until much closer to one's termination date. Service leavers discussed when would be the ideal time to start approaching prospective employer and concluded that it had to be only shortly before one's planned departure.

Another side of the coin was that some employers recognised that informal contacts and networks of former military personnel could be useful for staff recruitment. One employer commented on the positive value of the informal grapevine between military personnel in passing on information about available jobs and had helped him to attract suitable people from a military background.

"We're hiring more and more ex-Service personnel because they're a good fit for the work that we do. But you bring one person in, they recommend somebody else, who recommends somebody else. And that will have a domino effect, obviously, because if we've got a few people already from the military then it's going to seem more appealing, isn't it, for somebody who was thinking about it. So the fact that they're there would mean that more people will come, so I can see that having quite an optimum effect."

Employer, Carlton Barracks

On the other hand, the deficiencies in the networks of former Service people was put forward by one employer as a reason for their being 'less willing to enter self-employment.' In fact, the evidence points to the contrary.

"Networks are key... But they probably don't have the networks, and that's perhaps why they don't go into starting their own businesses. ...They haven't got the networks in the pharmaceutical industry or whatever... They had the networks in the military, and you kind of wonder if they are used enough. How well do those who have stepped out in that two-year transition use their networks as an opportunity?"

Employer, Bristol

In summary then, whilst former military personnel may well have some understanding of the value of networks in obtaining employment, it seems that there are a number of ways in which they may be placed at disadvantage, both because of their own limited experience of spontaneous networking techniques and the limitations of the networks they have had time and opportunity to build up in the world of civilian employment and business.

USE OF CTP SERVICES, HEADHUNTING AND JOB AGENCIES

The recruitment industry embraces a wide range of recruitment agencies and search and selection organisations, or 'head-hunters.' One in five Service people who responded to our survey reported using a head-hunter at some point in their job search. Considerable variety exists between the services these organisations offer to employers, principally helping them to find the right candidate for a job, advertise vacancies and support the selection process with various degrees of professional expertise and engagement. Parallel to this is a multitude of websites on which it is possible for individuals to search for jobs and register an interest in any suitable vacancy matching one's qualifications and experience. CTP works with the MOD and Right Management Limited[24] and runs one such website, RightJob[25] which works with employers who are particularly interested in recruiting former military personnel. Prospective employers and Service leavers

can register with the RightJob jobs board. Former Service people commented on their experience of using these facilities. An MOD interviewee felt that the RightJob service was a good offer and believed that by engaging with employers, some outmoded stereotypes could be corrected. Most Service leavers agreed, although one in five had never used the service.

No participants in any of our workshops commented on their use of both RightJob, and only one participant in our London workshop mentioned that he had registered with a recruitment agency. (He added that he had been successful in getting onto four shortlists, having made a total of ten job applications – on the face of it, a good 'hit rate'.) On the other hand, a participant in our Bristol workshop commented that he had, *"Given up wasting breath with head-hunters."* Asked why, he merely commented, *"They'd approach you, they'd suck all the information out of you and they'd give nothing back."* (Former officer, Bristol)

The foregoing does not, of course, mean that recruitment agencies or specifically, the RightJob jobs board is not offering a useful service in some respects, but there appeared to be little awareness or appreciation of this form of support in our workshops with Service leavers over 50.

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24 Right Management Ltd is a private employment agency owned and operated by Manpower Ltd.

25 RightJob is the online job advertising website for Service leavers run by CTP.

TABLE 22:

HOW WOULD YOU RATE SERVICES PROVIDED BY CTP?

|	VERY HELPFUL	HELPFUL	NEITHER	UNHELPFUL	VERY UNHELPFUL	DON'T KNOW
Individual career advice	16	34	27	12	5	7
Workshops	15	47	17	8	3	1
Financial and housing briefings	12	25	28	7	3	25
Training courses	16	38	17	5	3	22
Trial attachments and external training	6	11	11	3	1	68
CTP RightJob	3	25	10	7	5	21
Individual resettlement preparation	11	36	25	10	6	12
Post discharge support	5	12	25	9	10	38

FORMER SERVICE=192

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The employment market and its mechanisms are changing. Most employers and recruitment agencies are now using social media to recruit people to jobs. Online social network sites have become an essential forum on which individuals can advertise their skills. Use of social media sites can increase the visibility of an individual's CV many times over. Professional profiles can be made visible to the wider world, putting an individual's skills and experience in the public domain. LinkedIn can be a valuable tool, enabling potential employers to search for candidates and job seekers to market their capabilities.

A contributor to one of our workshops commented that LinkedIn was only available outside work and is not accessible on MOD systems. LinkedIn was seen as, 'One of the better tools' (Current transitioning, senior rank, London) and was useful in tracking down people who work in specific sectors or who might offer specific forms of employment. Another contributor mentioned Glassdoor[26] as an alternative to LinkedIn and spoke in support of it. However, the availability and use of such sites is making a decided impact on approaches to job hunting, and familiarity with the range of possibilities on offer is clearly important. One participant wondered whether there was a specific jobs board site that specialised in recruiting former RAF personnel – it seemed that this was not so, though there is perhaps a case to be argued for it. In considering the arguments for greater attention to the possibilities offered by social media, one participant urged that the value of face to face support groups and meetings should not be forgotten.

26   lassdoor is a privately owned and run job board site, and whilst it provides individuals with the opportunity to post a CV.
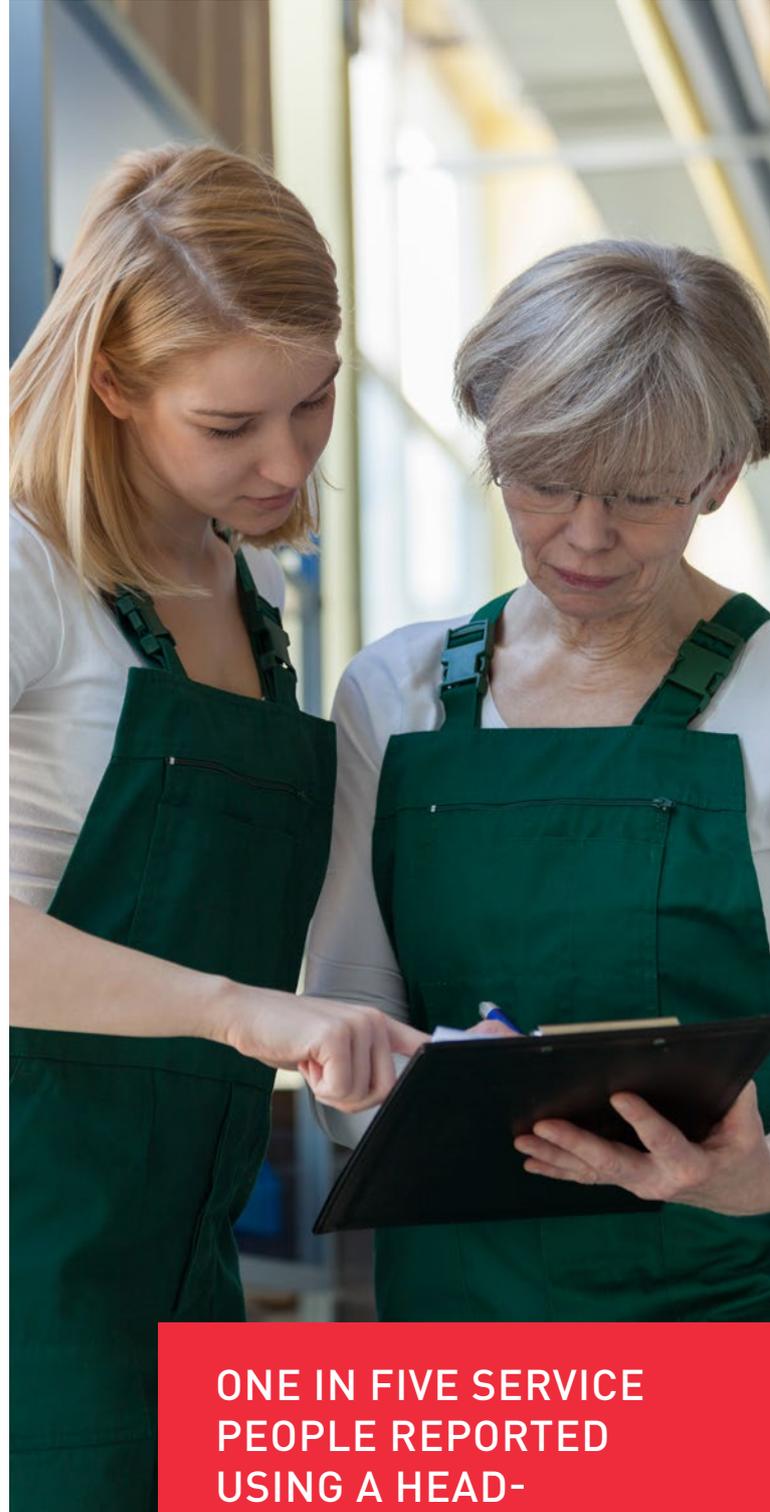
ONE IN FIVE SERVICE PEOPLE REPORTED USING A HEAD-HUNTER IN THEIR JOB SEARCH

GETTING FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYERS ON JOB APPLICATIONS

Our discussions on getting feedback on job applications established, predictably, that most people would much prefer to have feedback on a failed application. (The need is unlikely to arise when an application has been successful.) A comment was made on the tendency of some employers or recruitment organisations to provide limited *Pro-forma* feedback. One participant described having set out to obtain feedback in response to a Civil Service application.

"I stalked them down to their HR department to try and get verbal feedback. Because I can only improve if somebody tells me what I'm actually doing wrong, or what I'm not achieving, and providing evidence for this."

Current transitioning
senior rank, York

MOST PEOPLE WOULD PREFER TO HAVE FEEDBACK ON A FAILED APPLICATION

Another Service leaver commented that he felt that it would be justifiable for him to ring the hiring manager in advance of any application and ask for his views on whether or not he should apply.

"The one thing I would do differently is, I'd be quite tempted to ring the hiring manager, which, if you're going for a CEO job, it's the chairman, really, and say, 'I'm thinking of applying, am I wasting my time? If you've already got somebody else in mind, just tell me now.'"

Former officer, london

Such a desire for employers to show more respect for the time taken by applicants may seem naïve to those versed in the workings of the UK recruitment industry, which routinely omits to provide failed applicants with the courtesy of a rejection letter. Asking for feedback after an application may be an acceptable course of action, though enquiring whether an application would be 'wasting one's time' could be misinterpreted.

A number of other comments were made by participants revealing a strong desire for some form of face to face contact in the application process. Participants recounted examples of having made direct approaches for feedback or for an informal conversation with someone senior in an organisation, often with positive responses.

"Even really, really busy people have been prepared to make time in their diaries. You say, 'Half an hour, let me buy you a coffee.' They say, 'I'll buy coffee,' and you end up getting an hour, an hour and a half. What happens is some of them walk away thinking, 'Oh, I've just learned something I didn't know from him,' and others say, 'You should talk to X,' or, 'Maybe, but actually, you're not right.' You do get good feedback."

Former officer, London

The foregoing observations imply that employers may respond favourably to direct requests for feedback to unsuccessful job applicants. This may or may not be the case, though some employers may indeed be more ready to respond positively to someone from a military background. In any event, a face to face discussion, if it can be achieved, could well help a Service leaver to demonstrate their value or help in overcoming potential bias (whether for age or other reasons, including membership of the military.)

HANDLING REJECTIONS

A failed job application is inevitably a source of disappointment, as was evident in a number of the personal stories shared by attendees at our workshops. One participant criticised the CTP workshop for failing to prepare him for the depressing impact of a failed job application claiming that it was overly focused on the 'start of the process,' as opposed to a more complete 'end to end' familiarisation. Service leavers were asked about common forms of negative experiences in the job market, and it was clear that experiences such as discrimination, not receiving feedback when requested and being told that employers did not know how to use their skills were prevalent.

TABLE 23:

NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

	EX-SERVICE	CURRENT SERVING
Ageism	30	40
Negative attitudes toward employing ex-military	29	18
Other forms of discrimination	4	3
Uncertainty from employers about how their skills are used	46	42
Lack of feedback	34	40

CURRENT SERVING: 33
FORMER SERVICE: 167

Unemployed former Services personnel sought to understand the reasons for rejection and took exception to the lack of logical explanation. They appeared to realise that knowing one's way around the recruitment process, including the techniques of putting themselves 'in with a chance', required a better familiarisation than they had received in the CTP workshops. One participant shared his feelings as follows:

"So, they want 'leadership', 'communication and influencing skills' and so on, and you have to demonstrate in X amount of words how you obtained those competencies. I have actually put in applications for differing ranks using the same actual evidence for both of them and I've had differing grades back. I was rejected on both applications but… I got a higher grading for the higher graded post, and a lower grading for a lower graded post."

Current transitioning officer, York

Some applicants attributed their failure to anti-military prejudice. One participant felt that he had been particularly badly treated having targeted a senior role in a charity as the kind of post his experience and status suited him to apply for. Applying for the position of chief executive he was unsuccessful.

"I didn't make it onto the long list, I was told that they were 'Unwilling to consider candidates leaving the military.' "

Former officer, London

Others felt that harsh judgements had gone against them for transparently nonsensical reasons. One participant who had held a senior rank had spoken to a former colleague who had become an inspector of constabulary and felt convinced that he too had the necessary background to undertake a similar role. He failed to get through the first stage of the selection process and was surprised to learn that this was because he was supposedly, *'unable to demonstrate the ability to work under pressure.'* (Former officer, London)

Several were critical of the fact that jobs were often advertised as a matter of routine procedure, but were filled by internal promotions or by individuals who had been earmarked for the role. The following quotation illustrates the point:

"I applied to be the strategy director of the [government agency]. I worked with the[m] for four years... And, again, I didn't get through the first sift, and it was because they'd already decided they wanted somebody who was the private secretary to the Prime Minister. Fine, if that's what they want, but why waste my time?"

Former officer, London

Participants found successive rejections hard to take and depressing. The following comment was typical of those having made numerous unsuccessful applications:

"I went through a period where I became very disheartened because I was just getting, 'Thanks very much. You've got a wonderful skillset, it's very useful, but you're not quite what we're looking for at the moment.' I just kept getting that feedback and thinking, 'Am I ever going to get a job?'

Former officer, Edinburgh

Another attributed his failure to capitalise on relevant experience as being due to the fact that his career had confined him to military roles. His track record and experience to meet a civilian role could not be properly understood as suitable precisely because it was gained in a military context. Getting this across in a CV required time and effort to translate military jargon and contexts so that they made sense to a civilian employer.

"And they think that we don't have any relevant experience, and, of course, we have loads of relevant experience, it's just that we have to practise translating it. Which is why it took me about ten attempts to get to a CV which was genuinely civilian, rather than military."

Former officer, London

HIDING AGE

There were few direct references to age in our workshops, though enough to illustrate that an element of self-consciousness overage could be a barrier to some transitioning personnel. Nevertheless, there seemed to be some anxiety that age was something that had to be hidden and it was recognised that their ages may sometimes count against them. Three in ten former Service people said that they had experienced ageism when looking for employment. Some of the workshop participants expressed fears of age discrimination standing in their way - concerns which seemed more dominant among those with looser, less specific job search targets in mind than those who had a well-formulated plan.

The following comment hints that the speaker's fear of age discrimination may well be contained somewhat once he has focused on his job search strategy.

"The age-old question is, 'Will I get a job at my age?' ...I know that it does go on and there are ways of doing it. ...But the flip side is that I bring a huge amount of experience in managing people, so I still think I have got something to offer. I am a qualified project manager. So, I just need to sort out a few things in my head as to where I am going to work and if I can get a job."

Current transitioning officer, online

Whilst participants were conscious that age was a complicating factor in their job applications, they noted that there had been no attempt in their CTP workshops to 'stream' groups according to age. Some would have appreciated such an approach.

"I don't think that CTP quite knows what sort of pigeon-hole to put us in. There needs to be more emphasis put on the age group leaving after a full-service career. You know, when you are younger you tend to be more robust and can cope with changes more easily. When you are my age you are not quite so robust. So perhaps we need to be brought together and perhaps cossetted a little bit more....It would be so valuable to sit down with guys the same age as me, maybe with a mentor who had been through the same experience. That would be so valuable."

Current transitioning senior rank, online

Such an approach might help applicants to a better understanding of how age can be used as a selling point, rather than something to be hidden. Nevertheless, the fact of age discrimination has to be faced and sometimes alternative strategies to job searching are needed. The criticism of the CTP workshops lacking an age dimension was highlighted with the observation that one's Armed

Forces rank was the only form of streaming adopted, whereas there was a stronger argument for putting participants of similar ages together.

The missing element, according to this speaker, was that there was too little consideration of the process of resettlement of older people from the military.

"Because I am a warrant officer, I attend the CTW for people down to the rank of corporal, whereas the commissioned officers are all grouped together. Well, I have not got anything in common with a junior NCO who is leaving the military. What have I got in common with them? There is almost 20 – 25 years apart. The CTP workshop should be putting me in maybe with wing commanders and group captains, not because I think I am equivalent to them but because I am of a similar age and the sorts of things we are looking for outside will be similar."

Current transitioning
senior rank, online

"I think that first and foremost we need to ask, 'How do we start the process of resettlement for the older people?' I certainly think that talking with groups that have been through it would be useful. It is quite a lonely process for my age group because I have got no comparable experience to relate mine to."

Current transitioning
senior rank, online

HIDING MILITARY STATUS

Some of our participants gave disturbing accounts of anti-military prejudice. Three in ten former Service people said that they had experienced some form of anti-military bias at some point in their civilian careers.

> "Yes. When I first left the military I became a bus driver in Birmingham. When I went to the interview, the interviewing person said, 'I know you're former Service. I don't think this job could be good for you because you could become quite aggressive. Your people skills are not the best.' I was like, 'You what? That's not right.'"
>
> Former senior rank, online

Former Services people met anti-military prejudice which was decidedly negative. A typical view was that the military 'had been given everything on a plate,' when in fact the reverse was true.

> "You've served your country and, potentially, given your life for your country. Yet they don't recognise it or respect it."
>
> Former senior rank, online

In addition to anti-military bias, many of our participants were aware that their military titles could create misleading impressions. Most took the view that rank titles should be removed when applying for civilian jobs. This attitude was seen in discussions both with former-serving and still-serving officers.

> "I try and keep a low profile of what the job is I do. Partly because you do get pigeonholed pretty quickly as, 'an Army officer.' I sometimes tell people but sometimes I will just play a game of not mentioning it because it's nice not to speak about defence and Russian threats. ... It's nice to have a conversation about your hobbies, your families, your sports, your interests, your holidays instead. Yes, sometimes you keep it a little bit secret."
>
> Former senior rank, online

THREE IN TEN SAID THEY HAD EXPERIENCED ANTI-MILITARY BIAS

Most of our participants were keen to present an image of civilian normality in seeking employment and subsequently once they had gained a job. Whilst their military training had changed their attitudes and behaviours in important ways, they did not particularly want this to be apparent to work colleagues. They were aware that employers could vary in attitudes towards the military and that in some sectors, a military background might be seen as a handicap rather than an asset. They recognised that experiences may vary by sector and that a military background might go down well in some organisations but not others. Some had learned the value of pragmatism.

"I was working for a civilian organisation working with ex-Service… and I found I could use my military experience… I didn't throw it in their faces, but then I didn't hide it either… After all… we have got loads of experience, but I think sometimes we can be a bit daunting… You just have to, almost, step back."

Former officer, online

Other 50 + Service leavers people spoke of behaving so as to belie military stereotypes.

"You have to say, 'Yes, I'll make the coffees, I'll go and do the spreadsheet. It doesn't worry me at all.' When they see that, it's all a bit more relaxed. They see colonel, 'What? A colonel is making the coffee? Well, yes, because…' "

Former officer, London

On the other hand, an image of modesty may not be possible when one submits a CV in a job application. Officers who had risen to a senior level recognised the potential their service rank carried to catalyse prejudices. One spoke of a sarcastic jibe in a job interview. Some had considered understating their seniority in their CVs but concluded that this did not work.

"I've often thought of taking my rank out, or calling myself Lieutenant Colonel...When I haven't given a military rank they've looked it up online, or they've looked me up online, or they ask me in the interview, 'What were you in? What was your rank?' I was told before I left, 'For God's sake, don't become a brigadier or Major General. Leave before you get to that rank because you find it bloody hard to get a job.' "

Former officer, Edinburgh

One individual spoke positively about the advantages of getting a civilian secondment prior to leaving the Army.

"I've been lucky, really lucky, that I went and did something different... it was the best thing for me because it completely diluted all the military elements off my record."

Former officer, London

KNOWING THE LOCAL JOB MARKET

While participants, in general, had a good understanding of the potential employment opportunities available in the military aligned job market, the wider local job market was not necessarily so well understood. There was some recognition that a wise and practicable choice of job search strategies required more information. An employer commented:

> "There needs to be a lot more understanding…for example, locally in Bristol…around the creative, the hi-tech, the autonomous, robotics, which I am sure they have got great skills in, but it's about those innovation skills. Professional services, HMRC as a company with 1,000 people is setting up here, you know. I think there needs to be a better connection with local labour market information, not national. They need information relevant to the area where they wish to base themselves. They need to know what is available."

Employer, Bristol

Such local knowledge would be readily available to anyone seeking support in the civilian jobs market, from agencies such as the National Careers Service, Jobcentre Plus or local employment agencies. Embarking on a job search without understanding the opportunities available locally makes little sense. For Services people who may be planning to relocate on leaving, such information is particularly important. While many of our workshop participants did appear to have a good understanding of niche labour market opportunities, additional opportunities are being missed as the employer quoted above suggests.

A MILITARY BACKGROUND MIGHT BE SEEN AS A HANDICAP RATHER THAN AN ASSET

CHOOSING A GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION IN WHICH TO WORK

Several participants commented on the difficulties of geographical relocation on ending military service. Lacking roots near their current residence as a result of regular postings, they sometimes considered moving back to the areas in which they had family and friendship connections. This, however, did not necessarily put them in a favourable position with regard to searching for employment. This was true also for those who intended to continue as reservists after retirement.

"Like I say, the reserve service that I'm doing at the moment, I could have kept forever and ever, so I didn't need to look at any other career choices within the Forces, let's say if I wanted to go home and be a reserve, there is nothing in the North West. The North West is quite sparse in reserve service, so that's out of my hands to do that, and it would have to be a civilian job, to be honest."

Current transitioning senior rank, York

Another participant told us how a poorly researched relocation on leaving the Services had resulted in a period of frustrating and disappointing job search.

"So, I found the whole thing pretty frustrating. I have rather confined myself to working in Scotland, which has been a mistake, and I'm now not looking at Scotland at all. I'm just looking in London, abroad, anywhere. An element of desperation has crept in."

Former officer, Edinburgh

CONCLUSION

50+ Service leavers adopt a range of approaches and strategies to job seeking. Many seem to be successful, they secure jobs and seem to be settling in reasonably well. Others find jobs which are not to their liking and they embark again on the task of seeking a new job. Others spend a considerable period of time in a frustrating and unsuccessful job search. Many of these negative experiences could probably have been avoided by better preparation, planning and advice.

Whilst many of the labour market challenges 50+ Service leavers face seem similar to those encountered by people in the 50+ age range changing jobs generally, there are some distinguishing factors making Service leavers' situations unique. For example, virtually as an entire population, they are looking for career changes (as opposed to simple job moves within a sector in which they already have a settled career, job or profession). While they generally seek to build on their Services experience, as a group, they face new challenges in the labour market, including the military language they use, employers who do not fully understand the kinds of work they have done or how it might be relevant and an unfamiliarity with how the civilian labour market functions.

Key factors influencing their success or failure include the degree to which they have accessed career planning advice and job-seeking support, adopted a job search strategy, assembled and utilised effective CVs / letters of application, deployed a range of methods for contacting prospective employers and proactively "sold" themselves as potential candidates, including using networks and social media. Whilst much of the support 50+ Service leavers receive at the present time seems helpful, there also appear to be gaps, areas of naivety, and some lack of realism in how best to work within the civilian labour market and present themselves to prospective employers. The lack of a separate career transition workshop for 50+ job seekers which could address this, as well as other forms of self-help and continuing support, especially for the longer-term unemployed 50+ Service leaver, were all identified as factors contributing to the challenges faced by 50+ Service leavers in finding jobs.

CAREERS AFTER TRANSITION

So far, we have been discussing the experiences of 50+ Service leavers in transitioning out of the Armed Forces and into civilian work: what skills they have acquired in the Armed Forces; how employers consider 50+ Service leavers who apply for employment; how they experience transitions and turning points; and the approaches which they have taken to searching for and securing work. This section will discuss the endpoints which Service leavers have reached: the careers in which 50+ Service leavers are working now. How do they think about the work which they are engaged in now? What do they value in work and what would they like to change? How far do some 50+ Service leavers experience periods of unemployment and inactivity? Finally, what are the future plans of people who transition mid-career from military service to civilian work?

WHAT ARE THE DESTINATIONS OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS?

In the survey, we asked former Service people about their current employment status, working hours and employment contracts. These figures can be compared with the Labour Force Survey (Five Quarter Longitudinal Survey from January 2017 to January 2018). In order to compare like for like, the figures presented are for individuals 50-65. Because responses to the survey were overwhelmingly male, we have also weighted the Labour Force Survey data. Three differences between Service leavers and the general population stand out: 1) Service leavers are more likely than the general population to be economically active[27]; 2) those in work are more likely to be self-employed; and 3) they are more likely to be in non-permanent roles.

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27   Comparisons of 50+ Service leavers' economic activity with that of the general population at 50-65 should be treated with caution, as those retiring from the Armed Forces before the age of 50 on ill-health grounds will (by definition) be excluded from the 50+ retirees figure. Measurements of economic activity and employment of the general population make no provision to exclude long term in-active people in the same way.

TABLE 24:

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS AND THE 50-65 GENERAL POPULATION

	SERVICE LEAVERS	GENERAL POPULATION
Employed	64	69
Self-employed	18	2
In training	2	0
Family worker	1	0
Unemployed	9	2
Inactive	12	29
Full-time	85	81
Part-time	15	19
Permanent contract	80	96
Non-permanent	20	4

FORMER SERVICE: 181

The 50+ Service leavers who are either self-employed or in a non-permanent work arrangement could broadly be divided into two camps. The first one is composed of people who are choosing to work on a contractual basis. Two in five 50+ Service leavers who are working on a non-permanent basis or part-time said that they are doing so because they do not want to work on a permanent and full-time basis. They may have specialised skills for which businesses are willing to pay a premium and they value their ability to set their own hours, control their own schedules and decide which projects they want to be involved in.

A former officer, for example, said that he has been working for several years on contracts that each lasted around half a year. He did not see this employment as precarious, but rather a chance to select work which he found exciting and enjoyable.

> "I've worked as a contractor and it's worked very well for me... There's plenty of work out there, I find I sometimes have to turn jobs down because you can't do more than one at a time. I'm working full time, about to go back out to NATO again to start another job out there. A three-month contract that will probably be extended for another six months after that. It's definitely an opportunity to make money, I'm getting paid far more as a contractor than I ever was as a serving lieutenant colonel."
>
> Former officer, Bristol

Others, however, said they had been working on a part-time and non-permanent basis because permanent work was unavailable. One in six said that this arrangement was the only kind of work which was available while a further one in nine said that it was the only way to get into a line of work which they were interested in. A former Service person with whom we spoke said he had a long-time passion to work in the charity sector. After being rejected for several posts and being told by managers that he needed experience in the voluntary sector, he set up a business providing management consultancy in the third sector. The company is now a success and, should he have a future desire for a permanent job, he now has the sector-based experience he needs. Some worried about losing their jobs without notice or having to be in constant mode of job seeking.

> "I've got a contract out until March 2020, which is very unusual, normally it's only six months. I don't get holiday pay or sick pay, it's the usual de-risk of everything. It's zero notice as well both ways. I could go in on Monday and they could say, 'We're finishing the project. Bye-bye, thanks for your help.' I don't have that bit of security."
>
> Former officer, London

Others who were self-employed or working on a contractual basis worried about their ability to manage their businesses. One 50+ Service leaver said that while he had not been self-employed, he had friends who had lost their pensions and personal savings by putting money into businesses without having the skills necessary to run the businesses.

ONE IN FIVE FORMER SERVICE PEOPLE REPORTED BEING UNEMPLOYED OR ECONOMICALLY INACTIVE

BEING UNEMPLOYED

About one in five of the former Service people (50-65 years old) reported being unemployed (i.e. out of work but actively seeking employment) or economically inactive (i.e. neither employed nor seeing employment). Forty per cent of those who reported being economically inactive said that they would like to work. By contrast, according to the Labour Force Survey (50-65-year-old economically inactive, weighted sample), 20% of economically active within the overall labour market said that they would like to work if the right job was available.

Some 50+ Service leavers talked about struggling with long periods of unemployment or under-employment in which they were unable to secure work. They said that at times they felt isolated and rejected with one person describing the period as *"an extended time walking through the wilderness."*(Former officer, Edinburgh) One focus group participant said that when he had left the Armed Forces, he had struggled to cope outside the military community on which he had depended in his daily life. His difficulty in adapting to a civilian environment inhibited his ability to find work and being out of work further exacerbated his sense of loss in being out of the military.

Another discussant said that 50+ Service leavers who are out of work can feel invisible as they struggle in finding work. He argued that long-term unemployed can often believe that their problems are only addressed during the period leading up to Remembrance Day.

"Last Sunday, everybody was there wearing the medals, getting pats on the back. That's one day out of 365. The rest of the year you're on your jack, to be honest unless you've got a good team around you...I make no bones about that, but it's those that are less fortunate."

Former senior rank, online

ARE 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS HAPPY WITH THEIR CIVILIAN WORK?

Service leavers were asked to rate their current employment. Overall, survey respondents were happy with the jobs in which they were currently employed.

Former Service people who are in civilian jobs were asked what they thought about their current roles. On the whole, people were positive about the jobs which they had found. Having work which is interesting is the main priority of a plurality of 50+ Service people leaving the Armed Forces. 86% of former Service people say that their work is interesting. Over three in five say that it offers a good salary and three quarters say that it offers good work-life balance to allow them to meet their families' needs. One focus group discussant described the work which he does now as being less stressful than his military service.

"Working absolutely fine. Four days a week. Very, very happy. I go to camp, use the gym, much more relaxed. You don't have to worry about anybody's report to write and things like that. You don't turn up for the Goddamn conference. You just turn up, do your bit and then go home."

Former officer, Bristol

TABLE 25:

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYMENT?

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Interesting work	28	58	11	3
Good salary	16	45	26	13
Opportunity to help others	29	52	14	5
Flexible hours to be able to do other thing	22	46	23	8
Close to home	31	38	15	16
Meets my family's work life balance needs	25	50	19	6
Makes good use of my skills	26	46	17	11
Makes me feel valued	19	41	26	14
Offers new challenges	26	53	15	5
Offers a supportive work environment	13	52	24	11
Is the only job which is available	6	16	45	31

FORMER SERVICE: 118

Another said that the aspect of her work which she liked the most was the work environment and working with colleagues. She described her workplace as having many Service leavers so that the sense of community and mutual support which she experienced in the Armed Forces is replicated in her current workplace.

> "There is a good military community... Sometimes you can almost flood the market a bit too much with it. I think everyone here, I would feel, just fits in, blends in nicely. People wouldn't necessarily know, looking at the faces of us, that we're former Service."
>
> Former senior rank, online

Others, however, said that while they enjoyed the work that they were doing, they felt less valued by their employer than if they had spent their entire careers in the sector. Two in five survey respondents disagreed with the statement 'I feel valued by my employer', and discussions with focus group participants indicated that feeling undervalued often coincides with a sense of precariousness in work and being easily dismissed.

> "It will carry on for as a long they keep dicking me with things. The way I see it, if I prove myself useful, they'll keep finding things for me to do."
>
> Former officer, Bristol

SUBSEQUENT JOB TRANSITIONS

Some Service leavers emphasised that while they are happy with the work that they were currently doing, it took a long journey from leaving the Armed Forces to their present roles in which they felt settled and valued in their roles. It was noted by a few that most people needed to be prepared to make multiple transitions throughout their working lives, and the employability skills which they acquired when transitioning out of the Armed Forces would be needed in later job changes.

> "There's also the saying about as soon as you get your first job start looking for your second. That's probably right as well. Bed yourself in, get a bit of experience and then target where you really want to go."
>
> Former officer, Leeds

They described experiences of finding themselves in the wrong line of work; taking on jobs which they thought they would enjoy but subsequently changed their minds about; and being under-employed. Some former Service people said that people leaving the Armed Forces mid-career should manage their expectations in terms of finding work which suits them.

> "You really need to wake up and smell the coffee at a fairly early age. You need to understand that, I think from day one, unless you are very, very lucky, very, very gifted, that the Armed Forces will not be your only career."
>
> Former senior rank, online

Another put it this way:

"I think the main thing is people must open their eyes to the inevitability of leaving the Army… You know, I see too many people who are, 'I'm out in six months,' 'And what are you going to do?' 'Well, I don't really know yet.'"

Current transitioning officer, online

Those who had made multiple job transitions after leaving the Armed Forces said that the experience of early job changes helped them with those which came later. One described employment which he had soon after transitioning out of the military. Although he disliked the jobs and had viewed them as temporary, he was able to accumulate sector-specific experience and skills which he was eventually able to mobilise to secure his present job. He said that he needed time working in the civilian world in order to present himself as being the kind of worker who would fit into his chosen sector.

"But, I must admit, since I've left the Forces, the personality and persona I present when I'm working has changed drastically - massively compared to when I was in the Forces. I'm a different person now, to what I was then."

Former senior rank, online

Several focus group participants likened job transitions in the civilian labour markets to taking on a new posting. It was acknowledged that changing jobs in the later stages of one's career could be challenging, and many older workers would choose to persevere in a job that they do not enjoy rather than take a chance by looking for a new job. However, it was thought that experience in the military could help them maintain resilience when looking for a new role.

"The thing I come back with, when I was in the military my job changed every two or three years anyway and it was sometimes completely different. One time I'd be doing engineering, then I'd be training and then I'd be doing IT. I used to get used to it."

Former officer, Bristol

RETIREMENT PLANS

We asked survey respondents at what age they were planning to retire. 24% of respondents said that they had no plans to retire. Those who did have a plan for when they would retire gave ages ranging from 51 to 76. Both the median and average planned retirement ages were 63 somewhat lower than the current State Pension Age.

Older workers can often be pushed into retirement because they feel a need to escape work which is stressful, difficult or undervalued. They may also be pulled into early retirement through the inducement of an early pension or other financial arrangements which may cushion ending employment. A final question, therefore, is whether 50+ Service leavers feel that they are being pushed or pulled into early retirement. On the one hand, Service leavers have a military pension on which they can rely. Although many said that the pension was not enough for them to presently live on, it could be enough for them to retire on once expenses like mortgage payments and tuition fees subsided. Service leavers may also build up pension entitlements through civilian work, although not everybody who had found a civilian job had access to an occupational pension. Nevertheless, some of those with whom we spoke discussed retiring at a date when their pensions and savings combined would be enough to live on in retirement.

> "I'm still enjoying what I'm doing at the moment, and we'll be financially secure by next year. So, in terms of money, anything after next year is just a bonus."
>
> Former senior rank, online

Others could feel pushed into retirement if they are dissatisfied with the work which they have found in the civilian labour market. Those who struggled to find employment or who felt stuck in jobs which under-used their skills acquired through military service discussed a desire to leave the workforce as soon as they were financially able to do so. Some also said that knowledge that they had a pension to fall back on helped them to cope with changes in their working lives. One said that he knew that if his boss no longer needed him, he could afford to leave, albeit with a more modest retirement than he was planning for.

Most 50+ Service leavers reported being relaxed about retirement or not really thinking about it. Only 11% described retirement as a great relief, but only 17% described it as something that they were dreading or apprehensive about.

TABLE 26:

RETIREMENT EXPECTATIONS

Yes, I shall be pleased to retire/ It will be a relief	11
I am relaxed about it	60
Not really, I am apprehensive	10
Not at all, I am dreading it	7
I haven't really thought about it.	12

SERVICE LEAVERS (FORMER SERVICE AND CURRENT SERVING):191

Most 50+ Service leavers could think of at least one aspect of work which they would miss once they fully retired. A majority said that they would miss their work colleagues and the sense of feeling useful. The loss of income once they entered retirement was a concern of almost half of the respondents.

TABLE 27:

WHAT WILL YOU MISS FROM WORK? (MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED)

Nothing	12
Being with colleagues and workmates	53
The feeling of being useful	52
Having something to do	30
The respect of my colleagues	29
The work which I do	38
The money	47

SERVICE LEAVERS (FORMER SERVICE AND CURRENT SERVING):191

One focus group respondent summed up his retirement plan as wanting to carry on with work which kept him engaged and continuing on a mission.

"I need to be able to pay that and live, so I need a job in the short term at least. Beyond that I'm not ready to step down either, I'm quite looking for a challenge and keep going. As far as I'm concerned, I've got at least 10 to 15 years of work left in me. Onwards and upwards."

Former officer, Bristol

CONCLUSION

People who were in the process of transitioning out of the Armed Forces discussed the apprehension which they felt in looking for work in the civilian world. 50+ former Service people said that finding work which suited them was often a difficult endeavour and the learning curve of finding work which suited them was a steep one. However, while there were some Service leavers who discussed the struggles that they had had in finding secure work which they valued, many others talked about eventually finding employment which they valued and which made good use of their skills. Many framed participating in the job market as a journey rather than a single experience. Some noted the series of job transitions they had to make before finding positions which suited them while others said that they expected to be back in the employment market if their present job came to an end or if they decided that they wanted to do something different. Many said their military background provided them with skills which they needed in order to manage the labour market. Finally, while there was a range of views on what an ideal retirement age would be, anticipated retirement ages were somewhat lower than the State Pension Age. That said, economic activity amongst 50-65-year-old Service leavers was higher than that of the population as a whole. Many said that they valued work as an activity which gave them identity, purpose and the chance to build social networks and friendships.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS

Finally, we asked 50+ Service leavers to give their views on how the transition process for people like them could be improved. Now that they had experienced preparing, searching and (in some cases) securing jobs which could lead to second careers in the civilian world, what changes would they like to see? We invited their recommendations, specifically to link 50+ Service leavers more effectively with work which made good use of their skills, was rewarding and secure. Their opinions were sought in both the focus group discussions and by way of an open question in the survey. What follows is a summary of actions suggested for stakeholders under the headings shown.
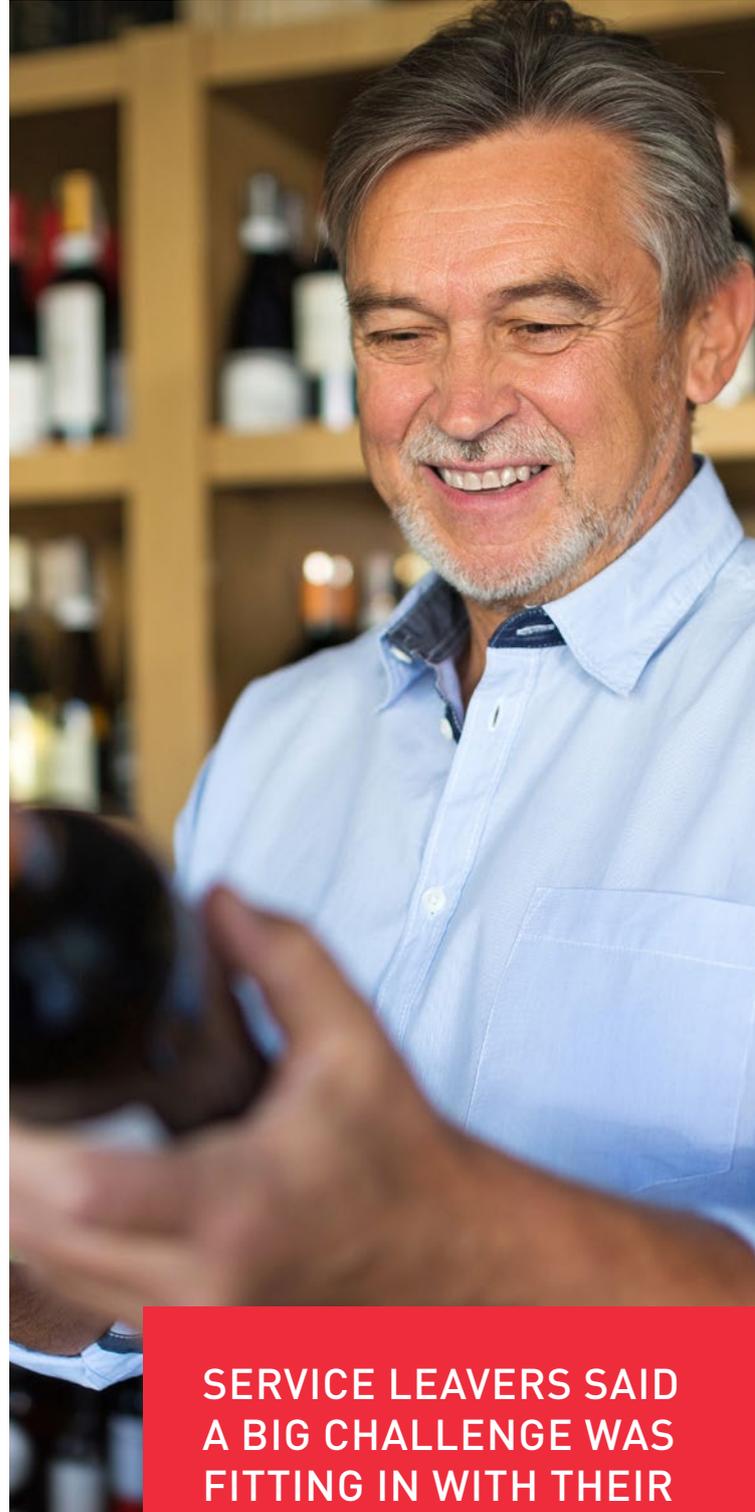
SERVICE LEAVERS SAID A BIG CHALLENGE WAS FITTING IN WITH THEIR NEW WORKPLACES AND COMMUNITIES

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND COMMANDING OFFICERS

More time for developing career portfolios: 50+ Service leavers made the point that the importance of developing a good career portfolio was instilled in members of the Services. While they were strongly encouraged to document all forms of transferable experience, training, skills and capabilities acquired in the Armed Forces, some felt that they lacked the time to do this adequately. Work often got in the way, especially if they were in responsible roles (paradoxically, where there was the most likelihood of developing the most transferable skills). It was thought that ensuring Service people had time to keep their career portfolios up to date throughout their careers would help them to produce dossiers which they could use once they start searching for work outside the Armed Forces. One 50+ Service leaver attributed her success in part to having a line manager whose philosophy was *"After thirty years of devoted service, the last two years are for you to plan your next career."* (Currently transitioning, officer, online)

Supporting overseas Service leavers: Several 50+ Service leavers whose final postings were outside of the UK discussed the difficulties which they had in accessing career services from the CTP and other organisations. They argued that improving access for people stationed overseas through online training, bespoke training and guidance, and time off to take part in career transition events in the UK would be helpful to this group.

More flexible exit dates: Some 50+ Service leavers said that they had missed out on civilian job opportunities because employers were unable to wait for them to complete their service. They thought that job searching at the beginning of the transition was unproductive because few employers would be willing to hold a post open for more than a few months. They suggested that more effort should be made to reach an accommodation with Service leavers who found a civilian job but still had months to complete their military service.

Tapping into the 50+ Service leavers' skillsets: Not all 50+ Service leavers were eager to leave the Armed Forces, and many felt a significant reluctance to do so. Work as a reservist was popular with those who wanted to maintain their connections with the military community and to continue their mission of serving their country. It was thought that the Armed Forces could make greater use of the skills of 50+ Service leavers who wanted to continue serving, albeit in a different capacity like training, mentoring younger service people, consulting or being a reserve source of labour.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT GROUPS LIKE THE CTP, THE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION AND OTHER MILITARY CHARITIES

Career guidance: Several 50+ Service leavers reported that they left the Armed Forces lacking certainty about what they wanted to do in their civilian careers. They talked about feeling lost and submitting job applications like shooting a scattergun when they should have been more targeted. While many 50+ Service had clear ideas on their career direction, many others could benefit from career guidance to help them focus on the types of jobs they would have most success applying for. It was thought that career guidance should start earlier than the start of the two year transition period so that Service leavers could build career profiles which would match the occupations and sectors to which they wanted to belong.

Briefings on ageism and other forms of discrimination: Widespread experiences with discrimination, both direct and indirect were discussed and it was thought that advice on how to handle such biases (for example, how to respond if someone calls you a toy soldier, as one officer experienced) would help 50+ Service leavers challenge stereotypes.

Challenging stereotypes: Many 50+ Service leavers wanted to see a higher level of challenge of stereotypes based on age, military status and the intersection of the two. The 'mad, bad and sad' image was thought to be particularly unhelpful to those seeking work and some thought that charities unwittingly reinforced such stereotypes in their campaigns to address the impact of combat experience on mental health. It was thought that there was plenty of material to embed positive images of 50+ Service leavers as one of the best-skilled workforces in the UK.

Portfolio work and self-employment: While many 50+ Service leavers were looking for permanent employment, others either were keen to set out on their own 'to be my own boss' or find themselves pushed into contractual work because of a lack of available jobs. Some thought that more training and support was needed for people who were setting up their own businesses and/or working on short-term contracts. Managing finances, marketing, accountancy and mobilising social networks for business were all mentioned as ways to support this group, but it was also thought that self-employed and portfolio based Service leavers could help one another in addressing common problems.

Negotiating salaries: Many 50+ Service leavers talked about the struggles they had in negotiating their own salaries and other conditions of service. If their expectations were set too high, the employer thought they were being unrealistic. (Service leavers were sometimes criticised for basing their salary expectations on their military job, rather than on what they had to offer a civilian employer). Setting an expectation too low resulted in employers doubting their commitment to the job for which they were applying. It was thought that more help could be provided in researching and setting a salary expectation which matched the skills and capabilities which the Service leaver offered the employer.

Pension and financial planning: There was confusion about how civilian work would impact on pension entitlements and taxation of benefits. Some 50+ Service leavers said that they would like more advice on this.

Continued support after the two-year transition: Some 50+ Service leavers experienced job loss or economic hardship after they left the Service and said they felt isolated and unsupported in trying to get back into work. They thought that continued job transition support from CTP and charities for Service leavers who made multiple job changes would not only support those who had served their country but also be an efficient way to enhance the access which employers had to Service leavers' skills and capabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Developing a better understanding of 50+ Service leavers: People without experience in the military have perceptions about 50+ Service leavers based on what is reported in the news. This often results in employers overlooking the qualities and attributes of people making mid-career transitions into civilian work. It was thought that employers who supported activities such as careers fairs, could get a more rounded picture of 50+ Service leavers and what they could bring to their organisation.

Asking about salary expectations: Many 50+ Service leavers struggled to answer questions about their salary expectations. Some employers appeared to believe that, because Service leavers were drawing a pension, their salary expectations would be lower than the going rate for the job. Some 50+ Service leavers said that they would appreciate training on how to define a salary range which would be commensurate with their skills and capabilities and be a fair proposal to make to an employer. On the other hand, it was also noted that employers could do more to set pay levels which reflect the requirements of the job rather than the negotiating skills of the job applicant. (Many organisations do indeed have detailed guidelines for their managers in setting pay levels, and regularly audit pay levels to address unfair biases.)

Guaranteed interviews: There were mixed views on offering a guaranteed interview to former Service job applicants who met the job specifications. Some 50+ Service leavers felt that such an arrangement would treat them as a protected group of workers and maintained that they did not want such special treatment. Others thought that the 50+ Service leavers, many of whom had not been in the job market for decades, could benefit from the experience of performing in front of an interview panel. It was also noted that military skills are not easily recognisable on a CV or application form and being interviewed can help 50+ Service leavers present their capabilities. There was some hesitation amongst employers about offering guaranteed interviews to 50+ Service leavers as such support is more commonly provided to job seekers with protected status. However, many employers are providing older Service leavers with other ways to present their skills and abilities to recruiters such as insight days and job placements as discussed below.

Insight days and job placements: Many 50+ Service leavers reported a positive experience with outreach events hosted by employers who were seeking to recruit Service leavers. They felt that having the opportunity to experience the work environment and engage with professionals in the organisations where they hoped to work, helped them improve the presentation of their capabilities to prospective employers. One 50+ Service leaver commented that the term 'transferable skills' could be meaningless unless the job seeker knew what skills employers seek. Insight days and job placements offered opportunities to gain such insights.

Promoting 50+ Service leavers with small and medium-sized employers: Both employers and Service leavers thought that SMEs could make better use of the skills and capabilities of 50+ Service leavers. SMEs can face specific skills shortages and recruitment difficulties but may lack the HR resources to think strategically about tapping into different sources of labour. It was thought that Service charities and the Ministry of Defence could do more to reach SMEs and talk about the advantages of employing 50+ Service leavers. Large businesses, which have discovered business advantages in recruiting Services leavers, could promote good practice within their supply chains.

Diversity and inclusion: Experiences of direct and indirect forms of ageism, anti-military bias and the intersection of the two were reported. Although the 50+ Service leavers with whom we spoke did not seek to be defined as a legally protected group under anti-discrimination law, they nevertheless felt that anti-military bias was both wrong and unproductive for the employer, particularly as it meant they missed out on recruitment of talented people. There was a view that employers with robust HR policies and training programmes to promote diversity and inclusion could apply similar approaches to eliminate discrimination against Service leavers, particularly those who were older and face more challenges in finding and securing employment.

Valuing 50+ Service leavers: One employer summarised the value of employing people who are transitioning out of the Armed Forces as:

"You've got these hugely rounded, driven people who are extremely focused, good workers and have proved this through their work history. So from the employer's point of view, you have got somebody that's extremely valuable and hardworking, with a great work ethic...who will put themselves on the line, as they have done in the past for Queen and country."

Employer, Carlton Barracks

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS

Some 50+ Service leavers advised those following in their footsteps to spend time getting to know the civilian communities into which they would transition, including the industries where they expected to work. One Service leaver advised others to experience life outside military communities, describing the latter as 'comforting but unproductive.' On the other hand, some Service leavers highlighted that Service leaver communities provided valuable support and resources in the transition process. Wherever one located in civilian life, Service leavers needed to be able to fit in with their new workplaces and communities. The following is a selection of some of the 'words of wisdom' and friendly tips which our interviewees and workshop members said they would wish to pass on.

Discuss plans with friends and family members: 50+ Service leavers talked about the importance of networks in the job searching process. One Service leaver explained that not only did he rely on his network in looking for vacancies and connecting with employers, but also in terms of coping with the stress and emotional labour of starting a new career and performing in front of job panels. He felt that the support of family members and friends was crucial in helping him through the transition process, though he had found this required him to be open with them about his plans, experiences and worries throughout.

'Pursue what you are passionate about': This was the advice provided by an employer. In asserting this, she acknowledged that few leave the Armed Forces to go straight into a job which they are passionate about. She emphasised that not all employers are expecting staff to stay with them for the long term and that many employers, like hers, were happy to provide jobs for Service leavers who wanted time to plan for their long term careers.

'Be comfortable with ambiguity': This view was made by a former officer who noted that Service people are skilled in managing with limited information and those skills can benefit them in navigating the job market.

'Sometimes you have to find out what you don't want before you discover what you want to do': A Service leaver described the process of finding a career as one of elimination. He tried several jobs before securing one which kept him motivated and engaged.

'Prepare yourself for civilian work-life': Several 50+ Service leavers talked about how surprised they were to discover the differences between military and civilian work. They noticed this especially when considering their experience of team ethos and 'working towards a common goal.' Some cautioned future 50+ Service leavers to be prepared for workplace cultures based on individualism and competition. Others said that 50+ Service leavers who valued community and team support should seek organisations which reinforced those values. One suggested 50+ Service leavers could ask prospective employers how they valued and supported team working.

'Learn the organisational culture of the businesses you want to work in': Some noted that job placements and similar opportunities can help 50+ Service leavers to understand and fit into the workplaces where they wanted to be employed. Some argued that while fitting in was important, it could only come about with experience in the work environment.

'Plan early, seize every opportunity, and understand that you need to adjust to the civilian workplace and not the other way around': The importance of planning was emphasised by several Service leavers. Some expressed regret at having failed to start planning their career transitions earlier than they had.

'It may take longer than you might expect': This was a prevalent view both in the survey and focus group discussions. The evidence from the survey showed that those who are currently leaving the Armed Forces may be over-estimating the time that they will take to find a job. Nevertheless, for a large cohort (especially those uncertain about what they wanted to do), finding a job which suits them can be a long journey.

'Remember that your first job won't be your last': One 50+ Service leaver said that if he had the opportunity to talk to his (somewhat) younger self, he would have told him not to become too fixated on finding exactly the right first job after transitioning to civilian work, since many Service leavers go through multiple job changes throughout their civilian working lives. Another described transition as 'perpetual and very attitudinal.' Some recommended that Service leavers should mobilise the skills which they had acquired through multiple deployments, to ensure they remained resilient in the civilian labour market.

A final recommendation which was given to all four 'stakeholders' was to understand the importance of providing support to 50+ Service leavers during a major turning point. Not everybody experiences the transition from military to civilian life as an upheaval, but many do and feel a sense of isolation and being in the wilderness if they struggle to find secure work. It was noted that employers, the MOD, the CTP and Service charities can play a role in supporting 50+ Service leavers not only in their initial transitions out of the Armed Forces, but through their subsequent journeys. The point was also made that Service leavers who had made successful transitions could provide a helping hand to those coming after them. Mentoring other Service leavers, providing advice and support and advocating for Service leavers within their organisations were all mentioned as ways to maintain the military ethos of comradeship in the civilian world.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to give insight into the experiences of 50+ Service leavers' experiences in the civilian job market.

The executive summary provides the detailed findings to the five objectives of the project as well as recommendations for the MOD, CTP, charities like the Officers' Association and RFEA on ways to improve the support provided to 50+ Service leavers in finding and securing work. An accompanying publication provides recommendations to employers in tapping into the skills, knowledge and abilities of people leaving the Armed Forces after the age of 50. This conclusion is not meant to repeat these sections of the report, but rather a few concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

The experiences of 50+ Service leavers are shaped by both their age and military status. Consequently, many of their experiences are shared with civilian older workers on the one hand and young Service leavers on the other. For example, Service leavers of all ages have challenges in redeploying the military acquired skills to civilian work. Further, older job seekers both with and without a military background can experience ageism and stereotypes which create barriers to sustainable work. However, the collection of experiences of 50+ Service leavers is unique and merit both academic attention and support from employers, government and third sector organisations. In addition, older former officers and senior rank Service leavers are distinct in the civilian job market.

THE COLLECTION OF EXPERIENCES OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS IS UNIQUE

- 50+ Service leavers framed their arguments to employers in supporting people like them into sustainable work as an effort which is good for business. There are certainly arguments that supporting people who have devoted the majority of their careers to public service is a worthwhile endeavour which organisations have a social responsibility to carry out. However, the emphasis which 50+ Service leavers wanted to make was the benefit which employers can gain by making use of their skills, experience, soft skills and capabilities. Bringing in and fostering 50+ Service leaver talent was positioned as good for business. This focus on the business case for improving the career transition process was shared by many employers.

- 50+ Service leavers are in an unusual labour market position of having spent a full career in a system which is different to the civilian job market in terms of training, job rotation, promotion and career development. Further, skills which have the potential to be transferable to civilian work is often not accredited nor recognised by potential employers. Transitioning to civilian work can be more disruptive than it would be for an older worker changing from one employer to another, even after long service. It may seem surprising that there are difficulties which many 50+ Service leavers have in navigating the labour market, but they are operating in an environment which is fundamentally different from the one they were used to. The importance of employability skills, support and help in getting a foot in the door is crucial to 50+ Service leavers as they embark on new careers.

- Long military service has instilled in 50+ Service leavers a strong sense of comradeship, mutual support, and teamwork. This spirit of community has been described by Service leavers with whom we spoke as crucial to their job search process and underscores the importance of social networks, mentors, veteran based job clubs and other mechanisms to facilitate Service leavers in supporting one another.

- The transition from military service to civilian employment is not so much an event but more of a process which can last many decades. Throughout their service to the Armed Forces, Service people are encouraged, if not required, to maintain PDPs in order to maintain a portfolio of skills, experience and capabilities which can be used the secure civilian work. To paraphrase one of the Service leavers we spoke with, the Armed Forces is the one employer which prepares its employees to leave from the first day which they are inducted.

- At the same time, 50+ Service leavers reported that it can take them many years after the transition that they feel entirely settled into their civilian careers. An interesting matched set of statistics came from the survey. On the one hand, over half of 50+ Service leavers said that they had been able to secure their first job before they fully transitioned out of the Armed Forces. On the other, two-thirds said that they had made more than one job change after transitioning into civilian employment. For many, the pathway from military service to a settled career in the civilian world can be a long and winding one which takes years to traverse. Many need support for years after their transition in order to reach a career which matches their abilities and aspirations.

- A significant minority of 50+ Service leavers have struggled to find stable work and have experienced years of unemployment and underemployment. As they try and fail in applying for employment which is at or below their capabilities, they fall into a spiral of detachment from the workforce. Chronic unemployment and underemployment can affect both former officers and senior ranks. Many struggle to adapt to the civilian job market and may need support in the form of mentoring, guaranteed job interviews and training to support them into work which suits them.

A question which could be posed is whether 50+ Service leavers are in a better or worse labour market position than older job seekers generally. The answer is complex. On the one hand, Service leavers have a great amount of support through CTP, charities and other groups in making a job transition. Access to training, career advice, insight days, mentors and other support are available to people leaving the Armed Forces in a way that eclipses the support (if any) which is available for older job seekers generally. Further, while many 50+ Service leavers described their military pension as an income which is not large enough to sustain their lifestyles, they did recognise the value of having a steady income which gave them some latitude in making career choices.

On the other hand, the transition from military to civilian work is a step across a wider chasm than many job seekers make when changing jobs. Therefore, the support they receive is helping them to make a challenging turning point. Further, the combination of discrimination and stereotypes which they face for being both older and with a military background often represents a significant barrier to work which they are capable of carrying out. The purpose of the report is not to rank 50+ Service leavers' challenges in finding employment higher or lower than other groups. Rather, it is to show the steps which organisations (especially those reporting chronic skills shortages) can take to tapping into the skill, experience and capabilities of those with long military service.

A final thought concerns the wider applicability of the research to public and social policy responses to rising retirement ages. As pension ages rise and people are leading healthier and longer lives, many are either wanting or needing to delay retirement. Many older workers will need to make a mid-career job change in order to stay economically active and will need retraining, mentoring, and support in navigating the job market. The UK government has shown an interest in developing and piloting innovations in supporting older job seekers (DWP, 2014).

The Service leavers workforce is the largest cohort of workers who regularly make a career transition after the age of fifty and the findings from this study have wider applicability to older job seekers generally. In particular, experiences of 50+ Service leavers in terms of managing their PDPs, navigating the job market and settling into new roles. Further, the CTP, Forces Friendly employers, charities like OA and RFEA can provide insight to employers on ways to tap into the skills of older workers who are seeking a career change. In order to address the challenges of an ageing society, government has called for the breaking down of 'silo thinking' (Government Office for Science, 2016: 12). There is a good case for government and employers to learn from the experiences of the Force Friendly sector in supporting mid-career transitions. Bespoke programmes run by CTP, employers and charities to support Services leavers can provide useful templates for building developing programmes for supporting other groups of 50+ job seekers.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

MODREC Letter of Support

Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee
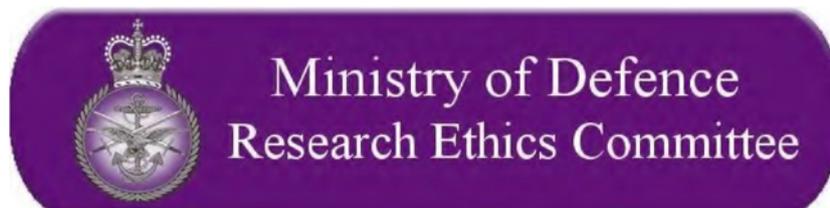
MODREC Secretariat
Building 5, G02,
Defence Science and Technology Laboratory,
Porton Down, Salisbury, SP4 0JQ

Telephone: 01980 956351 e-mail: MODREC@dstl.gov.uk

Professor Matthew Flynn   Our Reference: 917/MODREC/18

Email: m.flynn@agediversity.org

Date: 25th March 2019

Dear Matt,

Mid-career transitions of older Still Serving and Ex-Serving Personnel into civilian work

Thank you for submitting your revised application (917/MODREC/18) with tracked changes and the covering letter with detailed responses to the MODREC letter. I can confirm that the revised protocol has been given favourable opinion ex-Committee.

This favourable opinion is valid for the duration of the research and is conditional upon adherence to the protocol – please inform the Secretariat if any amendment becomes necessary.

The Committee also noted that your covering letter asked the following question:

> "Would the MODREC wish to review the transcripts before they are deposited with UK Data Archives in order to ensure that they do not contain operationally sensitive data?"

As an independent committee constituted to advise MOD, MODREC would not be able to perform this role. Instead we recommend that you contact your sponsor as listed in section 5 of the application to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place.

Please note that under the terms of JSP 536 you are required to notify the Secretariat of the commencement date of the research, and to provide copies of the consent forms and submit annual and final/termination reports to the Secretariat on completion of the research.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Simon Kolstoe

MODREC Chair

APPENDIX 2

Statement of Informed Consent

CROW
Centre for Research
into the Older Workforce

Statement of Informed Consent

The research project **Mid-career transitions of older Still Serving and Ex-Serving Personnel into civilian work**

is funded by the Forces in Mind Trust and supported by the Officers' Association

By:

Principal Investigators: Dr. Matt Flynn (m.flynn@agediversity.org)

Telephone:

Website: www.agediversity.org

The project is carried out between April 2018 and August 2019 in the UK.

You have the right to halt and to end the interview at any point in time, without having to give a reason.

All data, whether audio files or written transcripts, will be treated as personal under the General Data Protection Regulation, and will be stored in secure repository.

Interviews will be audio recorded by the research team and will be transcribed by an independent transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement with the researchers.

Data collected may be processed manually and with the aid of computer software.

Data collected will be used within this research project. Whenever we will use data from your interview, such as statements or direct quotes, we will anonymise your data so that you cannot be identified. If we would like to attribute a quote to you directly (for example, because of your expertise on a subject), we will only do so having received prior written consent from you to do so.

Copies of the transcripts of the interview will be offered to the UK Data Archive so that other bona fide researchers will be able to use the data. For this purpose, the transcripts will be anonymised so that they cannot be traced back to you. Also, the UK Data Archive asks users of data to sign a confidentiality agreement before granting access to the data. Audio recordings of the interviews, however, will NOT be offered to the UK Data Archive and will only be available to the team members of the research project, to the transcribers and the translators, and will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

Should you [i.e., the participant] have any concerns about the conduct of this research project, please contact the Secretary, Faculty of Business, Law and Politics Research Ethics Committee, University of Hull, Cottingham Rd, Hull, HU6 7RX; Tel No (+44) (0)1482 463536.

A copy of your interview transcript will be provided to you, free of charge, on request.

Name (Printed):

Date:

Signature:

Based on the information given above and the information I have received about the research project and my role as an interviewee:

1) I agree to participate in this interview.

2) I agree that this interview is audio-taped and transcribed.

3) I agree that the data is used for research purposes within the aforementioned research project.

4) I agree that the anonymised transcript of the interview is deposited at the UK Data Archive.

5) I understand the terms with which the interview will be conducted and material used, as described above and as agreed by me on this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research project, about the interview and about how the data is being used.

APPENDIX 3

Interview Protocol, Former Service People

Mid-career transitions of older Still Serving and Ex-Serving Personnel into civilian work

Topic guide

Tell participants (with written statement which participants can take away)

- Discussion will be audio taped, transcribed and anonymised for the purposes of analysis and summary report
- Anonymised transcripts will be available to participants upon request
- Participants have the right to not answer any question and/or withdraw from the conversation at any point
- We are looking for everybody to have the chance to have a say in the discussion
- If there is anything which participants would like to share with the research team outside of the workshop discussion, they can talk to the facilitator and/or contact me by email (m.flynn@agediversity.org) or phone (REDACT).
- How long is it going to take?

Questions for former Service people

Good (morning/afternoon). Thank you for talking with us today. We are conducting a project for the Officers' Association to look at the experiences of military officers who transition into civilian work after the age of 50. We would like you to think about your experience in making your transition from military service to a civilian based career: how you planned for the move; difficulties you faced; how you overcame problems; unexpected turning points and what advice you would give other officers who are making a mid to late career job change. From the research, we are planning to give insight to employers on how to tap into the skills, talents and experiences of ex-service people. We want to hear from you about your experiences.

- We would like to start by finding out a little bit about your journey from military service to where you are now. Could we start by asking each of you a) which part of the armed service had you served; b) when you left military service and c) what was your first job after military service and d) what your occupation is now?
- What made you decide to leave military service and pursue a career in the civilian world? Roughly how long did you think about making a career transition?
- What were your career ambitions when you were leaving military services? What were your reasons for choosing this new career?
- What were your strategies in reaching these goals? How long before the transition to civilian work did you start planning your career move?
- Where did you receive support in planning your transition to civilian work? (Prompt: CTP, your own command unit, your family/friends, mentors/other ex-service people). Was any support particularly useful in helping you plan for your new career? Was there help which you needed but couldn't find?

- How would you describe your experience starting a new career outside of military service? Would you describe it as smooth, difficult or a mixture of both? Did your expectations and search strategies change as you were looking for work? If so, how so?
- What barriers, if any, emerged as you were looking for work? (PROMPTS- not finding jobs which they wanted advertised, not being called for an interview, being rejected for a position). How did you manage setbacks you may have experienced? What advice would you give others facing similar challenges?
- Did new opportunities emerge as you were transitioning to civilian work (prompt- pursuing a new occupation not thought about before)? How did it emerge and how were you able to take advantage of it?
- How would you describe your first year of work after military service? Did you find the work much the same or different from your career in military service? Did you need support in adjusting to a new line of work? (PROMPT- training, mentor, help in building networks) Did you receive such support and from where? Did you find it useful?
- How do you feel about your career goals now? How different are they from your expectations?
- How would you do things different if you had the opportunity?
- Looking at your experience retrospectively, how can the career resettlement process be improved?

APPENDIX 4

Interview Protocol, Current Service

Officers' Association | **FiMT** forces in mind trust | **CROW** Centre for Research into the Older Workforce

Mid-career transitions of older Still Serving and Ex-Serving Personnel into civilian work

Topic guide

Tell participants (with written statement which participants can take away)

- Discussion will audio taped, transcribed and anonymised for the purpose of analysis and summary report

- Anonymised transcripts will be available to participants upon request

- Participants have the right to not answer any question and/or withdraw from the conversation at any point

- We're looking for everybody to have the chance to have a say in the discussion

- If there is anything which participants would like to share with the research team outside of the workshop discussion, they can talk to the facilitator and/or contact me by email (m.flynn@agediversity.org) or phone (REDACT).

Questions for current Service people

Good (morning/afternoon). Thank you for talking with us today. We are conducting a project for the Officers Association to look at the experiences of military officers who transition into civilian work after the age of 50. From the research, we are planning to give insight to employers on how to tap into the skills, talents and experiences of ex-service people. We want to hear from you about your experiences and how you are planning a new career outside of military service.

- We would like to start by finding out a little bit about your journey from military service to where you are now. Could we start by asking each of you a) which part of the armed service are you serving in; b) when did you join the service and c) at what stage are you in transition into transitioning out of the military service?

- What made you decide to leave military service and pursue a career in the civilian world. Roughly how long did you think about making a career transition?

- What are your career goals after you leave the military service? I have a list of five benefits of work. Which would you consider to be most important and why?

    - Work which is interesting

    - Work which is important to others

    - Work which offers good pay and benefits

    - Work which helps build social networks

    - Work which is respected by others

- What kind of jobs do you expect would meet your career goals? Are there kinds of jobs you are planning to pursue?

- What are your strategies in reaching these goals? How long before the transition to civilian work did you start planning your career move?

- Where are you receiving support in planning your transition to civilian work? (Prompt: CTP, your own command unit, your family/friends, mentors/other ex-service people). Is any support particularly useful in helping you plan for your new career? Is there help which you needed but couldn't find?

- What do you expect your new career outside of military service to be like? Would you describe it as smooth, difficult or a mixture of both? Did your expectations and search strategies change as you were looking for work? If so, how so?

- What barriers, if any, do you expect to find when looking for a new job? (PROMPTS- not finding jobs which they wanted advertised, not being called for an interview, being rejected for a position) How do you expect to manage setbacks you may experience?

- Do you experience new opportunities emerge as you were transitioning to civilian work (prompt- pursuing a new occupation not thought about before)?

- What do you expect work will be like once you transition out of the military service (PROMPT- training, mentor, help in building networks)? Where do you think you will receive such help?

- How do you feel about your career goals now? How different are they from your expectations?

- How would you do things different if you had the opportunity?

- From your experience now, how can the career resettlement process be improved?

APPENDIX 5

Focus Group Protocol: Employers

Mid-career transitions of older Still Serving and Ex-Serving Personnel into civilian work

Topic guide

Tell participants (with written statement which participants can take away)

- Discussion will audio taped, transcribed and anonymised for the purpose of analysis and summary report

- Anonymised transcripts will be available to participants upon request

- Participants have the right to not answer any question and/or withdraw from the conversation at any point

- We're looking for everybody to have the chance to have a say in the discussion

- If there is anything which participants would like to share with the research team outside of the workshop discussion, they can talk to the facilitator and/or contact me by email (m.flynn@agediversity.org) or phone (REDACT).

Questions for employers

Good (morning/afternoon). Thank you for talking with us today. We are conducting a project for the Officers' Association to look at the experiences of military officers who transition into civilian work after the age of 50. We know from background research that employers generally have positive views on ex-service people, including older ones, but may find it challenging to find ways to make use of skills acquired through military service. We'd like to get your perspective as employers who are seeking talent and skills and have either recruited ex-service people or are thinking of doing so. From the research, we are planning to give insight to employers on how to tap into the skills, talents and experiences of ex-service people. We want to hear from you about your experiences.

- We'd like to start out by learning a little bit about your company. Could you tell us about your business: the industrial sector, number of employees and location. Could you also tell us about some of the big workforce challenges you face? (Prompt: skills shortages, turnover, recruitment)
- We'd like to know about the current selection process you go through when recruiting professionals. In particularly, could you tell us how you:
    - Advertise the post (prompt- internal/external; how expansive the advertising) o Draft the specifications for the job (prompt- whether narrowly or broadly define the role)
    - Select candidates for interview (prompt- do you prioritise candidates with experience working in your sector?)
    - Interview and select a candidate for employment
    - Would you say that your company recruits from a wide pool of talent or a more select group of potential employees?

- Have you employed older ex-officers? How did you recruit them? Was their military service a factor in your decision to recruit them?
- Many employers report positive perceptions about military service which would encourage them to recruit an older ex-officer who applied for a job. I would like you to comment on these.
  Do you agree or disagree?

  - Having good formal qualifications gained during military service ○ Having good leadership skills
  - Being honest and trustworthy
  - Having a sense of duty
  - Being dependable
  - Motivated by a desire to support the team
- Employers also report some negative perceptions which might make them less likely to hire an older former Service officer. Again, could you comment on these and how likely you are to agree or disagree?
  - Not having the relevant skills for the job
  - Not having experience in the sector they are applying to work in ○ Being rigid and resistant to change
  - Potentially needing help in managing a mental or physical health issue

  - Not being able to adapt to work outside of military service

- Does your organisation have any of the following policies/programmes in place to support older former Service officers such as the following:
  - Working with CTP, the Officers' Association, or other similar organisations in encouraging applications from older ex-officers
  - Reviewing recruitment processes in order to address unconscious biases
  - Providing mentors to ex-officers to help them adapt to new work environments ○ Having employee networks for ex-service people to have a say in organisational policies
  - Any other interventions to help older ex-officers secure and maintain work
  - What are the organisational benefits of having policies in place to support ex-officers?
- What have been the challenges in implementing these policies?
- What recommendations would you give employers who are looking to recruit and retain older ex-officers?

APPENDIX 6

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