



Transition in Scotland

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Foreword

Scotland is home to some of the most famous and highly-regarded military forces in the world. Our men and women – whether serving with the Army, Navy or Air Force – have always played a vital role in the defence of the United Kingdom while serving with distinction in conflicts across the globe over many years. We have a deep-seated pride in their achievements and retain a well-deserved reputation for accepting them into our lives and communities.

But all soldiers, sailors and airmen eventually have to hang up their uniforms, leave the military behind and become a ‘civvy’ with a new job, new friends, often a new house and new ambitions. No-one escapes this transition which, for an unfortunate few, can be a desperately difficult adjustment after a relatively cocooned life in the Services.

Like the majority of my peers, I never gave much thought to ‘transition’ for most of my time in the Royal Navy. Too often the ‘second career’ took second place to the challenges and pressures of the moment. In common with many I also had a naïve belief that my transition would be entirely effortless with every aspect falling into place with minimal work on my part and few stresses for my family, my friends and myself.

Fortunately, as I approached retirement and signed up for the range of resettlement activities offered by the Ministry of Defence, I realised how deluded I had been and began to understand a bit more about what lay ahead. In the end, I was very lucky that I had the time and opportunity to take advantage of the significant help on offer, with the result that I eventually enjoyed a relatively smooth and uneventful transition. However, I was also aware, even then, that many of my contemporaries – and their families - were having a much more difficult time and were often struggling to adjust to the life changes that they were now experiencing.

In Scotland approximately 1800 men and women complete their military service and settle – many with their families - in our communities every year. As Scottish Veterans Commissioner, I have been asked by the Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for veterans, Keith Brown, to investigate how this diverse group prepare for, and cope with, transition using the recent studies by Lord Ashcroft, Forces in Mind Trust and others as a baseline.

This work has highlighted the many differences Service Leavers find in Scotland – especially amongst our devolved public services. It has also identified many examples of good practice unique to Scotland and areas where further work can help ensure a ‘good’ transition for those completing their military service.

I would like to thank all those individuals and organisations that have helped inform this report and look forward to working with them in the future in order to make Scotland a place where Service Leavers will always choose to settle and have the opportunity to flourish.

Eric Fraser CBE
Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Introduction

TRANSITION FROM THE ARMED FORCES

Transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life invariably involves leaving behind a job, a home, a community and a unique way of life. Most Servicemen and women – and their families – cope with this change remarkably well, proving how adaptable they are and confirming an ability to deal with a range of fundamental life-changing experiences that few of us ever have to endure. It comes as a shock to walk off the gangway, step through the camp gates or hand in keys to a Married Quarter for the very last time – sometimes after a career that may have lasted over 30 years. Suddenly you find yourself in an entirely different world that can often be very unfamiliar, uncertain and surprisingly unforgiving. Ensuring that every Service Leaver has the skills, support and advice to complete this transition successfully is crucial – whether to the individual, his or her family, the community or wider society. It is reassuring to see that there is such widespread support for this ideal.

TRANSITION – A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Since leaving the Royal Navy in 2014, and being able to look back on the entire resettlement process, I have started to understand more about the issues and challenges. In particular, I have become very aware of how important a successful transition is to the individual Service Leaver and to their family. A ‘good’ transition helps secure work, a house and a strong social network. It makes the transition process less traumatic for all, helps establish a clear pathway for future success and goes some way to ensuring each veteran and their family become net contributors to society in the longer-term.

However, a ‘good’ transition cannot be guaranteed and I have become increasingly aware that some Service Leavers never have this positive experience and leave with little preparation, advice or support. This can be the result of many factors, including the amount of time they have spent in uniform, their Service, geographical location, family circumstances or their background prior to joining up. Some get excellent support – better than they are likely to receive from any other employer in the UK – but others struggle to get the most basic levels of help as they seek employment, housing and a life ‘beyond the wire’.

During the past six months as Veterans Commissioner, I have seen a wealth of evidence, research-based and anecdotal, that emphasises the importance of a successful transition and its role in ensuring longer term, positive outcomes for Service Leavers.

Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP) – Civvy Street: the New Frontline (2012)

ASAP's 2012 report focussed on transition and made the telling point that most Service Leavers transition successfully, but a significant minority experience challenging problems that are often multiple and complex. Many of these "were directly or indirectly the result of the success or otherwise of the veteran's transition to civvy street. Whether this issue concerned welfare, benefits, employment or debt, the cause of the issue can often be traced back to this initial transition."

Unfortunately, this is borne out by what I have seen on several occasions where a failed transition has led directly to multiple and complex problems in later years which have, in turn, made it extremely difficult for ex-Service personnel to adapt to civilian life. In the worst cases this has led to the breakdown of relationships, unemployment, homelessness and serious health issues. Unsurprisingly, this has serious consequences for the individuals and their families. It also has an economic cost as these people have less money to spend in the community, make a smaller contribution in the way of taxes and typically require additional support services to help them cope with their problems.

Forces in Mind Trust – Transition Mapping Study (2013)

This wide-ranging report not only mapped the process but also attempted to quantify the costs of poor transition. The model assessed the costs to the public sector associated with: unemployment, mental health issues, alcohol, drug abuse, criminal offending, prison sentence, homelessness, debt and family breakdown. Costs were projected to peak in 2013 at £122 million across the UK.

The good news is that this issue has recently become the subject of extensive debate in the military, amongst charities and in political circles. Improvements to the transition process are seen as an essential part of the Armed Forces Covenant and a rightful recognition of an individual's service. I am pleased to have had the opportunity to be part of this 'conversation'.

BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

The idea that everyone leaving the Army, Navy and Air Force should have a 'good' transition is not new and has been the subject of several reports during the past two years. Of these the *Transition Mapping Study* by Forces in Mind Trust and Lord Ashcroft's *Veteran's Transition Review* have been the most insightful and influential, making a number of important recommendations intended to improve the overall transition process and associated support structure. The Ministry of Defence and others have readily accepted a number of these, with several already being implemented as part of a wider policy review. This is very welcome.

Forces in Mind Trust – Transition Mapping Study (2013)

- *Transition experiences vary greatly. They are significantly influenced by both the individual's attitude to transition, and by their wider social context*
- *The differences between military and civilian life are under-estimated. Even for those who are well-prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise*
- *Families matter. The extent to which a Service-Leaver's family is able to help is a strong indicator of transition success (this extends beyond spouses and partners to parents and siblings)*
- *Financial awareness is important. Individuals can be financially cocooned within the Services. The financial demands of civilian life can be a shock*
- *The quality and consistency of the transition process within the Services have improved but the process remains uneven; and after transition, the safety net that could be provided by Services charities is hard to navigate.*

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG PC – Veterans' Transition Review (2014)

- *Transition is important for the Armed Forces and society as a whole, not just the individual.*
- *There is no shortage of provision for Service Leavers – and most do well.*
- *Preparation by the individual is essential – and good information is key.*

However, as valuable as many of these reports have been in identifying the problems of transition today and suggesting far-reaching improvements, it is noticeable that there has been little acknowledgement within them of the specific challenges faced by Service Leavers who eventually settle in Scotland. As we know, the landscape here is quite different, not just geographically, but also culturally, politically and administratively – a situation not always well understood by colleagues in the rest of the UK.

TRANSITION – A SCOTTISH PERSPECTIVE

The purpose of this report is to address aspects of this shortfall, provide a Scottish perspective of the transition process and offer suggestions as to how Service Leavers might be treated when they decide to settle in Scotland. I see no reason to comment on each and every recommendation made by Lord Ashcroft, FiMT and others - a large proportion have relevance right across the UK (including Scotland) and make great sense. It is important, though, to identify the differences that will affect Service Leavers in Scotland, highlight the opportunities that are currently available and recommend changes that might lead to an easier transition or improved long-term prospects for those leaving the Armed Forces.

In Scotland the most obvious and far-reaching differences found by Service Leavers concern the provision of public services, most of which have been devolved to the Scottish Government and are now delivered by Local Authorities and NHS Scotland.

It is almost inevitable that everyone leaving the military in Scotland will need to engage with these organisations as part of their personal transition process, whether about their health, housing, education or employment options. An unfortunate few may also find out about our Criminal Justice system. What may not be immediately apparent to the Service Leaver is the different approach to government in Scotland, which agencies have responsibility for delivery of public services and what they can expect in the way of support as a member of the ex-Service community.

Beyond these devolved public services, it must also be remembered that Scotland also has several other characteristics that provide a different context for Service Leavers. Of these, the most important may be the distinct nature of a Third Sector that provides vital support to the ex-Service community and others. We are also lucky to have a growing network of veterans' Champions across all sectors who are dedicated to reinforcing the values of the Armed Forces Covenant and a private sector that is just starting to see the benefits of recruiting Service personnel and their partners.

METHODOLOGY

My task, therefore, as Scotland's first Veterans Commissioner has been to take a close look at the recent work on transition in the context of what is happening in Scotland and suggest where we can do more to help those leaving the Armed Forces and considering settling here. This focuses, in turn, on:

- Housing
- Employability (including education and training)
- Health and wellbeing
- Information and co-ordination

I have also followed the lead from Lord Ashcroft and FiMT in paying particular attention to those who have served in the military for four years or less, known as Early Service Leavers (ESLs), and the problems they may face on discharge. As has become apparent in recent years, this group makes up approximately half of all personnel who leave the Armed Forces each year, includes a large proportion who have failed to complete basic training and contains many more who may experience significantly greater difficulty adjusting to civilian life. I believe more can be done for these young men and women in Scotland – especially in improving their chances of obtaining meaningful employment – and have therefore made several references to them during the writing of this report.

“Early Service Leavers, who have served up to four years (but may during that time have completed operational tours in places like Afghanistan), receive only the most basic support for transition and are the most likely to experience unemployment and other problems.”

Lord Ashcroft’s Veterans Transitions Review

In setting out my wider thinking on this subject, I have been drawn to two recurring themes that first emerged during the development of my Strategy and Workplan¹. The first is that we should be seeking to PREVENT long-term problems for veterans in Scotland by ensuring that our public services are correctly configured to helping Service Leavers and their families adapt to life ‘outside the wire’. I have become convinced that early investment in the transition process is money well-spent, creating greater opportunities but also delivering savings as demand for public services reduces in the longer-term.

Secondly, I have also become aware of the need to PROMOTE the strengths, skills and attributes of our Service personnel with much more passion and determination. Too often these people are labelled either ‘mad, bad or sad’ – a grave disservice to a talented and committed cohort who have the potential to make a considerable contribution to Scotland’s economy, communities and society after they complete their military service. Reinforcing the positive qualities of Service Leavers and challenging the negative perceptions is, I am convinced, the first step in changing attitudes, opening up more employment opportunities and making it easier to make that ‘good’ transition.

Finally, this report includes a number of recommendations and some specific findings that suggest further study. However, I should emphasise that this is neither an academic paper nor a policy document but rather a study that seeks to build on previous work. Conclusions have been shaped during a sustained period of engagement that has involved policy makers; public, private and Third sector leaders; elected officials; academics; clinicians and practitioners; and, most importantly, Service Leavers and veterans. I have highlighted a number of examples of good practice from many different sectors but acknowledge that I haven’t been able to include descriptions of all the excellent work and innovative ideas that I have seen in the past six months.

¹ Scottish Veterans Commissioner - Strategy and Work Plan 2015 (<http://www.gov.scot/About/public-bodies/veterans-commissioner/Publications/ScottishVeteransCommissionerStrategyandWorkPlan2015>)

Housing

BACKGROUND

Few aspects of transition can be so variable for Service Leavers as those they experience when trying to find somewhere to live after completing their military service. For some who own a property or are resettling in the area where they were previously serving, the process can be quite straightforward. However, for large numbers who have typically depended on MoD-provided accommodation and plan to settle elsewhere, there will be significant nervousness, uncertainty and difficulty. As highlighted by Lord Ashcroft and others, this is often exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the housing situation outside the military community, ignorance of the costs of renting and a naïve assumption that a house will always be provided when needed. This is particularly evident amongst younger Servicemen and women, many of whom are single and fall into the category of Early Service Leavers. Conversations with Service Leavers and veterans in Scotland confirm a similar pattern north of the border.

On examining the various conclusions and recommendations made on this topic in the past year, I have noticed that most have been based on the legislative and service delivery frameworks found in England and Wales. Suggestions that all Local Authorities must adhere to guidance on homelessness set out in the Localism Act 2011, for example, is simply not applicable in Scotland. This begs the question as to whether there are significant differences – and whether these dictate a different way of approaching the problem in this part of the UK. This has been a major factor as I have examined this issue.

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Housing is a devolved matter in Scotland, which means there is a markedly different system of legislation, policy and service provision than found in the rest of the UK. Under a concordat between the Scottish Government and its thirty two Local Authorities, Scottish Ministers are responsible for setting the direction of policy and over-arching outcomes that the public sector in Scotland is expected to achieve. Each Council has responsibility for service design, resourcing and delivery. Adding to this complexity is the fact that many Local Authorities own and manage the allocation of their own housing stock but others, such as Glasgow, have transferred all of their housing to associations or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

As a result of these disparities, Service Leavers and their families are immediately faced with the challenge of understanding how the local 'system' works in their area (as opposed to the rest of the UK), how they should interact with their Local Authority (or housing association) and what sort of response they can expect. The problem for many is that each Council has quite different ways of

conducting its business and often uses a range of criteria for allocating houses. Where housing stock has been transferred, each housing association may well have its own allocation policy and application process – all potentially adding further confusion and complexity.

As well as these organisational differences in Scotland there are also distinctive legislative and regulatory frameworks which can muddy the waters for Service Leavers whose understanding – if any – is more likely to be based on the system found in England. Some of these differences can offer benefits and opportunities, which may be significant and need to be highlighted to any Service Leavers choosing to settle in Scotland. Notwithstanding, there is also a clear and immediate requirement to ensure all personnel, wherever they are based, are aware of the different frameworks that exist. This includes the impact of homeless legislation² and the availability of shared equity schemes³ operating in Scotland. Ability to access these opportunities will depend on the availability, accuracy and relevance of the information provided to those going through the transition process.

INFORMATION ON HOUSING OPTIONS IN SCOTLAND

Many of Lord Ashcroft's recommendations in his report concern the provision of information to Service Leavers. His analysis that "information about housing, finances and other important aspects of civilian life was perfunctory or absent altogether" reinforced the findings of FiMT and have since been confirmed by a series of conversations I have had with veterans, service providers (from all sectors) and policy makers.

Early support to Service Leavers as they seek long-term, affordable accommodation is essential if we are to prevent future problems such as 'sofa-surfing' and homelessness. Like many others, I believe that an effective and sustained effort to inform Service personnel and their families of the opportunities, challenges and threats they can face on leaving is crucial and I am very pleased to see that there are several initiatives, both in Scotland and UK-wide, that address this issue. However, I also believe that more can be done.

² Under new homelessness legislation in Scotland, all households assessed as unintentionally homeless, or those threatened with homelessness, are entitled to settled housing as a legal right. The legislation also removed the requirement to establish "priority need", a key difference from the legal framework in England. If ex-Service personnel and their families are homeless because they don't have anywhere to stay or their current accommodation is not suitable or if they are at risk of losing it, they must be given housing, as well as free information and advice by local councils. The housing may be temporary accommodation in the first instance if permanent accommodation is not available.

³ Whilst social housing will remain the likely option for many leaving the Services, there are other forms of support available for Service Leavers looking to settle in Scotland. Those who have left the Armed Forces in the last two years and are seeking to buy a home will have priority access to the Scottish Government's Low Cost Initiative for First Time Buyers (LIFT) shared equity scheme which helps people on low to moderate incomes across the country get on the property ladder.

Finding: More can be done to make the provision (and sharing) of housing information more effective and in my next report, I will be reviewing the content, accessibility and relevance of the information offered to Service Leavers and veterans on housing options in Scotland.

In this vein, I strongly support Lord Ashcroft's emphasis on the provision of housing advice and applaud the UK Government's commitment to providing online housing information through the websites of the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO) and Veterans UK. I also recognise the efforts by JSHAO to provide face-to-face briefings for Service personnel on base and encourage the involvement of spouses and partners at every opportunity.

However, as mentioned earlier, the rules and procedures regarding housing in Scotland are quite different and therefore dictate a separate syllabus if those who plan to settle north of the border are not to be disadvantaged. This means that UK-wide websites have to include specific information pertaining to Scotland, briefers have to be aware of the differences in policy and approach while presentations and pamphlets need to reflect any differences the Service Leaver will experience should they settle north of the border. Some of this already exists – JSHAO briefings and the Scottish Government booklet on housing “*A Scottish housing guide for people leaving the armed forces and ex-Service personnel*” are well-known examples – but I believe there is a need for the Scottish Government to work very closely with the UK Government to ensure each element reflects the Scottish ‘dimension’ and is kept up to date.

Recommendation 1: The Scottish Government should continue to work with the UK Government to ensure that online advice and briefings reflect housing policy and provision in Scotland, so that Service Leavers choosing to settle in Scotland are not disadvantaged.

Ultimately, the availability of accurate, comprehensive and timely information will always be a critical factor in determining how successful a Service Leaver is in finding appropriate accommodation on leaving the military. Experiences in Scotland still vary widely but there are plenty of good practices that need to be shared and new ideas that are ripe for testing. I will explore this in more detail in my next report.

LOCALLY FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS

The issue of information is not just about how we support our Service Leavers. It is also important that our public services have information about those transitioning in order to provide appropriate housing, better plan services and offer the right types of support. On this point, I am wholly in agreement with Lord Ashcroft who recommended that Service personnel should be required to:

“... give more detailed information about their resettlement address as soon as it is known, and any special needs they may have, to help Local Authorities and other agencies plan service provision.”

Many Local Authorities are aware of the positive contribution Service Leavers and their families can make to communities. In Scotland, several have made it known that they are keen to engage with those leaving the Armed Forces at an early stage in their transition process with the aim of scoping their needs and tailoring support to match. I have also seen a number of examples of good practice in different parts of Scotland which provide additional housing for new veterans. I was particularly pleased to see that Lord Ashcroft highlights the innovative work being done in **Dumfries and Galloway** to allocate a percentage of social housing for Service Leavers and am glad to report that **Scottish Borders** is now adopting a similar scheme.

Initiatives like this broaden the range of options available to Service Leavers but I believe further effort is required to link those going through the transition process to Local Authorities and to those public services that are standing ready to support them. The ability to shape locally flexible solutions to smooth transition at a local level is an exciting development and one which should be promoted and protected wherever possible.

However, I am also aware that the difficulties of sharing information hampers work in this area and is a constant frustration for many Local Authorities and charities.

For that reason, I support Lord Ashcroft's call for more information to be provided about intended resettlement destinations; it has been raised with me by various organisations and would be of particular benefit to Local Authorities like Dumfries and Galloway who would like to do far more to support Service Leavers. There are, of course, potential data protection issues in passing on personal information but I would hope that these can be addressed through an appropriate 'consent' process and by carefully explaining the benefits to those about to leave the Services. Explained properly, I am sure a large proportion would jump at the opportunity of getting bespoke advice from a local expert who is eager to offer assistance and support.

To this end, I note that the UK Government has announced further work to be done on developing and maintaining contact with Service personnel on transition. In the meantime, I would encourage the Scottish Government and COSLA to engage with the UK Government to ensure their information needs are factored into any protocols that are introduced.

Recommendation 2: The Scottish Government and CoSLA should engage with the UK Government to ensure that work on providing more information about resettlement destinations reflects the information needs of Scottish Local Authorities.

HOUSING SUPPORT FOR SERVICE LEAVERS IN SCOTLAND

Third sector organisations play a vital role in supporting Service Leavers who are experiencing particular challenges in finding suitable housing in Scotland.

A report produced in 2014 by the University of York for Forces in Mind Trust, *Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Single Veterans in Great Britain*⁴, made the point that, after London, Scotland had the greatest number of dedicated bed spaces for veterans anywhere in the UK. Here, the provision of housing for those who have served has a long and commendable history and I would want to pay particular tribute to those organisations, including **Scottish Veterans Residences**, **Scottish Veterans Garden City Association** (now Houses for Heroes), **Haig Housing** and **Erskine**, who continue to play such a crucial role. Many were founded in the aftermath of the First World War but their commitment remains undiminished and I have seen how their services continue to adapt and evolve to meet the needs of Service Leavers today.

Scottish Veterans Housing Association

I was delighted to attend the opening of new high quality accommodation at Bellrock Close, provided by the Scottish Veterans' Housing Association in Glasgow. This is an innovative service providing transitional support with health and wellbeing, education, training and employability and future housing needs all being catered for by the Association and its partners. The facility comprises 30 fully furnished one-bedroom flats adjacent to a specialised support facility for single adults who require transitional support.

Military Matters

...is a specialist project within Housing Options Scotland that provides an independent housing brokerage service to veterans and their family members. With support from Scottish Government and Poppyscotland, they have provided detailed housing information and advice to dozens of serving personnel and veterans, contributing to JSHAO housing briefs and providing advice on housing at several Careers Transitions Partnership (CTP) employment roadshows around Scotland.

⁴ University of York - Meeting the Housing and Support needs of Single Veterans in Great Britain (http://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2014/VETERANS%20REPORT_2014_WEB.pdf)

Of note is the success of the development of Bellrock Close and the Military Matters project, both of which are the result of partnerships between several organisations with funding coming from the public and Third sector. There are also other examples across Scotland of Local Authorities collaborating with veterans' organisations to provide new homes, one of the most innovative being **Highland Council's** work with **Houses for Heroes Scotland** (HfH) to provide five new homes for veterans in Inverness. My sense is that this approach is being used more and more as organisations see the benefits of harnessing expertise from different sectors – it is certainly an area that needs to be watched with interest.

Finally, in this section I would like to return to the issue of information and its critical role in each of these projects. Details of all the properties managed by the charities mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are accessed through the [Common Housing Register](#), hosted by **Veterans' Scotland** and managed through its Housing Pillar. This model is based on a simple database and a single application form that provides access to all veterans' accommodation available from a wide range of providers in Scotland. It was highlighted in the York University report as an example of a simple system that satisfies an important need.

EVIDENCE NEEDS

Notwithstanding the current levels of interest in the provision of housing for those transitioning from the Armed Forces, it is obvious that there are still significant gaps in our understanding of the major issues. This is particularly so in Scotland and is something I would be keen to see addressed as part of the overall response to the housing needs of veterans.

The University of York report could only provide limited evidence and a fairly basic picture of the situation in Scotland. Their survey was sent out to all 32 Local Authorities but, disappointingly, elicited responses from only 7. In a similar vein, their researchers were only able to conduct a single focus group discussion amongst veterans in Scotland as part of their study.

Although data collected in Scotland suggests that overall rates of homelessness among single veterans in Scotland, like the rest of the UK, may be falling, questions remain about the strength of the evidential base and I would suggest that further research is required. I am particularly concerned about the plight of Early Service Leavers (ESLs) who are recognised as especially vulnerable when they depart the Armed Forces. These leavers are not eligible for the range of support offered to longer serving personnel and may find it difficult to find a job and accommodation.

Anecdotally, I have heard of widespread homelessness amongst this group with increasing numbers relying on friends and family to provide informal shelter and a temporary address. According to charity

practitioners who work in this field and knowledgeable veterans, this phenomenon - often referred to as 'sofa surfing' - is a growing problem that may be hidden from officials and researchers. Those who fall into this category may struggle to find stability in their lives but can also encounter additional barriers which inhibit achieving successful transition. This is certainly an area where preventative measures could mitigate a long-term problem.

Finding: Understanding the scale of housing problems faced by Early Service Leavers is an essential first step in addressing the issues and I will be looking be looking at the overall evidence needs in relation to housing options for Service Leavers and veterans in Scotland as part of my housing workstream over the coming months.

Employability, Education & Training

Turning to what is, in my view, one of the most important factors in achieving successful transition: finding a job. This is where the twin strands of **prevention** and **promotion** really come to the fore with early interventions preparing Service personnel for civilian employment and helping them avoid later difficulties, and proactive campaigning countering the negative perceptions that frequently disguise the skills, qualities and attributes these people can offer in the workplace.

In Scotland we are fortunate to have a number of policy initiatives and innovative schemes that are designed to get people into work or set up their own businesses. None are aimed specifically at Service Leavers but I have been surprised (and delighted) to find that the vast majority are equally available to military personnel who decide to settle in Scotland. Indeed, discussions with policy makers, business organisations and academics have confirmed a universal desire to encourage greater participation by the ex-Service community and a wish to see them take advantage of the various schemes already available. This is very encouraging and provides the main theme for this part of my report.

TRANSITION TO THE CIVILIAN WORKPLACE

During the past few months I have experienced at first-hand the types of support provided to Service Leavers by the Career Transition Partnership. For many - especially those who have been in the Armed Forces longest – this offers an excellent package of resettlement training and briefs which typically culminate in the Serviceman or woman finding a job and making a smooth transition to civilian life. Lord Ashcroft focuses a great deal on this process, its strengths and weaknesses as well as the options for change as the contract comes up for renewal this year.

Since this is an aspect of transition that is firmly in the category of a 'reserved power', and therefore the responsibility of MoD and the UK government, I will make no comment about this package or Lord Ashcroft's specific recommendations on the subject. However, I fully support his suggestion that the transition package should be expanded to include help for all Service Leavers who have completed basic training and I welcome MoD's introduction of the Future Horizons programme that is targeted towards ESLs⁵. Given the number of younger men and women leaving the military in Scotland, this will be a critical element in securing employment on leaving.

⁵ Whilst many Service Leavers find new employment fairly quickly after discharge some face significant barriers to employment. This is reinforced by CTP figures which suggest that only 52% of ESLs had found employment within 6 months of leaving compared with 85% of those who had served longer.

Looking forward, I will also be interested to see some of the details of the re-let Career Transition Partnership contract. Lord Ashcroft offered a number of suggestions that would extend its scope and reach but, whatever transpires, it will be important that the Scottish Government, its agencies and further/higher education sectors work closely with the UK Government to ensure that any new arrangements link effectively with the distinct policy and delivery frameworks for employability and skills that are already established in Scotland.

Recommendation 3: The Scottish Government and its agencies should engage closely with the UK Government once the new Career Transition Partnership programme is in place to ensure that devolved services can provide the full range of employability, skills and learning support to Service Leavers in Scotland.

UNEMPLOYMENT AMONGST THE EX-SERVICE COMMUNITY IN SCOTLAND

One potentially disturbing statistic that has come to light very recently concerns levels of unemployment amongst the ex-Service community in Scotland. A household survey published by PoppyScotland in December 2014⁶ found that members of this group in Scotland were:

- less likely to be in work (57% compared to 73%),
- more than twice as likely to be unemployed (12% against 5%) than their counterparts in the general population, and
- that one in five members of this group who were of working age were experiencing some employment-related difficulty.

No matter how these figures are read – and it should be noted that they only come from a single source as yet - they raise a series of questions about the causes and implications for the community. There has been insufficient time to look at this issue in any detail to date but I intend it being part of a wider study into employability that I will progress this year.

Finding: Levels of unemployment amongst the ex-Service community in Scotland are worryingly high; this needs to be investigated and will therefore form part of my employability workstream planned for later this year.

⁶ PoppyScotland – Health and Welfare of the ex-Service Community in Scotland 2014
(<http://poppyscotland.org.uk/docs/Poppyscotland%20household%20survey%20report%20FINAL.pdf>)

EARLY SERVICE LEAVERS AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Many of the initiatives intended to increase levels of employment in Scotland are targeted at younger people who are struggling to make their own transition from school to training or employment. ESLs, although they may have spent time in the Armed Forces, often present a very similar picture on discharge, many of whom may possess few formal academic qualifications, life skills or knowledge of work outside the military. Those who fall into the 17-21 age bracket are eligible for a range of programmes which may help them get back into work and improve their long-term prospects of sustained employment. The opportunities are there but I am also aware that more may have to be done to increase awareness of the schemes available in Scotland and encourage greater participation, both before and after leaving the Services. To me this is a key component in PREVENTING future problems and one where early investment could pay significant dividends.

The Scottish Government, working in partnership with Local Authorities and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), has worked hard recently to offer a range of support to young people. This has reduced youth unemployment from 25.4% in 2011 to 14.5% in 2014. More recently, the Scottish Government has published a refreshed Youth Employment Strategy (see below) that identifies several key areas where improvements can be made in promoting skills development and further improving levels of youth employment.

Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

In December 2014, the Scottish Government responded to the report of Sir Ian Wood's Commission on Developing Scotland's Young Workforce with a refreshed Youth Employment Strategy. This Strategy includes a significantly expanded Modern Apprenticeship Programme and strengthened employer engagement, but also recognised cultural issues which can lead to inequality in the labour market.

"As a society we will do better if we can benefit from the skills, talents and innovation of all our people. That is why we are committed to enabling everyone to participate fully in the workforce, especially groups that are currently underrepresented."⁷

The upshot of this is that there is a changing landscape of support for young people in Scotland that can also be made available to younger Service Leavers, particularly ESLs and those without the qualifications or particular skills to overcome the barriers of finding a job in an unfamiliar market. The next section highlights some of these initiatives alongside some recommendations to make them more

⁷ Scottish Government – Youth Employment Strategy (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/12/7750>)

accessible to Service Leavers that may need additional support. It is a lengthy list but one which provides a solid framework of opportunity in Scotland that should help get the very best from those who are returning after time in the Forces. The main schemes on offer through the Scottish Government and Local Authorities are set out below.

Opportunities for All is designed to provide Scottish 16-19 year olds with access to a range of opportunities, guaranteeing an offer of a place in education or training that might otherwise not be available. It places specific focus on young people 'not already engaged in education, employment or training' but while the scheme was originally designed to provide a transition path from school, it could clearly benefit young Service Leavers returning to a civilian life.

Some of those young people might well have qualified for this programme previously had they not entered the Armed Forces and since few will have had the opportunity to improve their educational qualifications or skill-sets during their short military service, I believe a sizeable number could be strong candidates for this scheme. However, to ensure that as many as possible can access **Opportunities for All** – and the fewest number are disadvantaged because of their military service - I would encourage the Scottish Government to consider extending the upper age restriction to allow slightly older ESLs to benefit. This will have long-term benefits and help the youngest, and most vulnerable of Service Leavers.

Recommendation 4: The Scottish Government should consider introducing flexibility to relax the age restrictions, extending the eligibility for criteria within 'Opportunities for All' for Early Service Leavers.

Another opportunity for ESLs is available through the **Community Jobs Scotland** (CJS) programme, aimed in this case at helping unemployed young people aged 16-19 into employment. This scheme is delivered by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) - in partnership with the Scottish Government - and offers training opportunities in the Third Sector for a minimum of six months.

During various phases of this programme, places are ring-fenced for groups where a specific need has been identified. This includes disabled young people, those with long term health conditions and those leaving care - relaxing age restrictions for the most vulnerable where required. As future phases of the scheme are rolled out, I would encourage the Scottish Government to consider including ESLs as one of the targeted groups. It may also be appropriate to include the ex-Service charity sector in this scheme with a particular focus on offering positions to those who had previously served in the Armed Forces.

Recommendation 5: The Scottish Government and the Third Sector should consider piloting a Community Jobs Scotland (CJS) programme aimed at Early Service Leavers.

The **Youth Employment Scotland Fund** is part of the Scottish Government's commitment to help unemployed 16-29 year olds into work - the age criterion was extended in August 2014 - and I believe this could be of huge benefit to many of our Service Leavers, not just ESLs. The funding supports recruitment incentives for employers for at least 26 weeks, covering a minimum of half the salary costs at the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

Similarly, the **Targeted Employer Recruitment Incentive** (ERI) is designed to encourage employers to assist the transition of young people who have a disability, an additional support need (ASN), background as a care leaver or an ex-offender into sustainable employment. I would urge the Scottish Government to consider extending these offers to Early Service Leavers as a category facing unique challenges and barriers to employment:

Recommendation 6: The Scottish Government, in partnership with Skills Development Scotland, Local Authorities and the Third Sector, should consider options to extend recruitment incentives so that they encourage employers to recruit Early Service Leavers.

The **Employability Fund** is also designed to support activity that will help individuals to develop skills needed to secure a job or progress to more advanced forms of training. The main aim of this initiative is to increase core and employability skills; increase work experience; and, gain employability-related qualifications. Referrals for this programme are made through Skills Development Scotland and Job Centre Plus but, unlike other forms of support mentioned, this funding is not restricted to certain age groups. As a result this offers a route, potentially opening support to a wider range of Service Leavers seeking to enhance their skills. Again, I would encourage the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and Skills Development Scotland to identify ways in which Service Leavers could be made aware of these opportunities:

Recommendation 7: The Scottish Government, Local Authorities and Skills Development Scotland should consider options for targeting the Employability Fund, and future employability services, at Service Leavers

One key programme, which I believe all young Service Leavers should be sign-posted to as a matter of course, is the **Modern Apprenticeship scheme**. This initiative, through which the Scottish Government has plans to deliver at least 30,000 'starts' per year by 2020, is an excellent opportunity to

gain skills, experience and a qualification while in employment. As it expands the apprenticeship offer, the Scottish Government is also seeking to encourage groups that are currently under-represented to participate. This includes challenging gender and cultural stereotypes.

I would be keen to see ESLs – and other leavers who might qualify – included amongst this group and a far greater effort directed towards encouraging young Servicemen and women to enrol in Modern Apprenticeships, tapping into their military experience and discipline.

Recommendation 8: The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should consider actively promoting Modern Apprenticeships to Early Service Leavers and to their potential employers.

Also flowing out of the refreshed Youth Employment Strategy is a commitment by the Scottish Government to establish industry-led Regional **Invest in Young People Groups** across the country. These are intended to encourage employers to be at the heart of the new approach to promoting youth employment, both nationally and locally. Although a still relatively new initiative, this could be a very useful forum for promoting Service Leavers amongst employers and is one that I would encourage the Scottish Government to exploit as much as possible in conjunction with many of the schemes previously mentioned.

Recommendation 9: The Scottish Government should utilise Regional Invest in Young People Groups across Scotland to promote young Service Leavers amongst prospective employers.

In sum, there is a significant amount of employability support available to Service Leavers in Scotland, especially for those who are discharged within their first four years. Much of this complements the efforts by MoD, charities and private organisations and is a great resource.

However, in order for these opportunities to be fully exploited in Scotland, it is vital that the Scottish Government works closely with the UK Government to ensure information on these schemes is made available to all who may be eligible and that those assisting the transition process – both in the military and the civilian sectors – are kept fully up-to-date with the detailed options and rules. It is equally important that those delivering the programmes are also aware of their applicability to the ex-Service community and the broad drive by the Scottish Government to encourage participation wherever possible.

Recommendation 10: The Scottish Government, working with devolved partners and engaging with the UK Government and Armed Forces, should identify opportunities and consider options for marketing its youth employment initiatives to Early and young Service Leavers, which might include targeted presentations, tailored leaflets, accessible on-line information and wider campaigns to raise awareness of the support available.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

To date I have focussed on the needs of younger Service Leavers who are making the transition to civilian employment, training or education but it is just as important to consider the older generation who may have their own challenges in finding a job. This group are likely to be better qualified and more experienced, adept at identifying the courses and qualifications they need and more confident when applying for a civilian job. They can also know how to use the services of the **Career Transition Partnership** and will probably be more aware of the support provided by **RFEA, the Officers Association** and other organisations.

But to many employers this group can be seen as a risky investment given the oft-held perception that they will be aggressive, inflexible or difficult to manage – an extension of the view that all are either ‘mad, bad or sad’! Clearly this is incorrect and hugely unhelpful.

Countering these negative perceptions is an issue that is mentioned several times in Lord Ashcroft’s report. His conclusion that such misconceptions create an extra barrier to leavers finding work is fully supported and I see a major role for the Scottish Government in PROMOTING the ex-Service community amongst employers in the private, public and charity sectors. Such advocacy will go far, I believe, in debunking the myths about Service personnel and open up many more welcome avenues for employment for this group.

Although the formation of formal links between MoD and industry through the Defence Relationship Management Organisation is to be welcomed, within Scotland there is already a well-established infrastructure, at national and local level, that allows government to engage regularly with large-scale employers, industry representatives and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). I would encourage the Scottish Government (with delivery partners) to consider how these might be used to further promote employment opportunities for Service Leavers, as well as exploring opportunities for work placements for those shortly to leave the Services.

Recommendation 11: The Scottish Government should use its existing mechanisms for engaging with employers to promote the employment of, and work placements for, Service Leavers within its broader employability policy framework and delivery infrastructure.

EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT MODELS

During the past six months I have been made aware of many excellent initiatives in different parts of Scotland that support ex-Service personnel back into employment or help them set up their own businesses. Many of these combine the skills, imagination and resources of several diverse organisations that often span several different sectors, but always with the aim of making a difference for those transitioning to civilian life. I have been impressed with this type of collaboration, welcome the impact they are making and see it as an excellent model for the future.

Of these, one of the most effective has been **Glasgow Veterans Employment Programme**, a scheme run by Glasgow's Helping Heroes (GHH) and the City Council that pays a wage subsidy to employers who take on ex-Servicemen and women aged between 25 and 49 who would not otherwise qualify for employment support. Veterans who enrol in the project are also offered advice and training as well as support that allows them to adapt skills learned during their service career into ones which will help them enter the civilian job market. The scheme has supported 126 veterans to gain employment opportunities since August 2013. Not only does this provide ex-Servicemen and women with new career opportunities, this investment in prevention yields significant savings to the public purse, with GHH estimating the overall benefit to delivering employment for veterans to be greater than **£17 million** through increased economic activity and a reduction in benefit costs.

Another smaller project that falls into the category of a successful partnership is **Employ-Able** which assist the members of the ex-Service community who suffer from low motivation, depression and other mental health problems. It also helps those with learning disabilities through a programme of one-to-one and group support, enabling them to progress into employment at a pace which takes into account their needs and abilities. Funded by **PoppyScotland** and delivered by a team of Mental Health & Employment Support Workers employed by **the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)**, the scheme has benefited 160 veterans since coming into existence in November 2012.

Finally, the third example of close collaboration between different sectors that benefits Service Leavers in Scotland is demonstrated by a project run by **Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce** called **Veterans into New Employment (ViNE)**. This scheme - which also involves the MoD, PoppyScotland and the CTP - supports ex-Service personnel into self-employment, recognising the transferable skills which many Service Leavers can apply to running their own businesses.

SKILLS, QUALIFICATIONS AND LEARNING

The issue as to whether Service Leavers have the correct skills to fit into the civilian workforce after their military career is one that gets significant attention in recent reports on transition. I welcome recommendations by Lord Ashcroft and FiMT on the adoption of Personal Development Plans or Pathways (PDP) and see these as providing a vital record of qualifications, training, education and achievements for all Service personnel. Indeed, this is something that Scottish Ministers, especially Mr Brown, have advocated for some time.

I am also pleased to see the UK Government's commitment to rolling out these Plans (or Pathways) and look forward to seeing how they evolve over the coming months. One plea I have is to ensure that the specific needs and circumstances of those who will eventually settle in Scotland are recognised and have a place in the final version. I strongly recommend early and substantial engagement with MoD to ensure this happens.

Recommendation 12: The Scottish Government, its agencies and Scottish Local Authorities should work with the UK Government to ensure that the new Personal Development Plan and related course modules are relevant to those settling in Scotland.

A further area that is recognised by many as a crucial part of the transition process is the need for a robust and effective means of accrediting skills, experience and qualifications gained during military service. Much work has been done on this over many years but I have concerns that employers still have difficulty making sense of the process while Service Leavers can struggle to have their qualifications accepted in some civilian organisations.

This issue is further complicated for those in Scotland by the current emphasis on mapping military qualifications and skills against those used widely across England and Wales. This is understandable but can put those who are settling in Scotland at a disadvantage given our separate education system and qualifications authority.

The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report of 2013 stated that:

“Collaborative investigative work is on-going between the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the MoD on accrediting military skills, so that those leaving the Armed Forces can best set out their skills to potential employers.”

This would be of immense value to Service Leavers in Scotland and is to be commended but I am unsighted on this work and would welcome further updates from the MoD and SQA.

Finding: If Service Leavers settling in Scotland are not to be disadvantaged, military skills must be mapped to Scottish qualifications.

Finally, under this heading of Skills, Qualifications and Learning there is the issue of Further and Higher Education (FE/HE) for Service Leavers in Scotland. To date I have had few opportunities to delve into this issue in any detail but discussions with the likes of Glasgow Caledonia University hint that there may be considerable scope to improve FE/HE opportunities for Service personnel as they leave the military. The need is evident, as made clear by PoppyScotland in a recent report that stated that, compared to their counterparts UK wide, veterans in Scotland were “*significantly less likely to have an academic qualification*” with fewer educated to Degree, Higher or Standard Grade level.

Glasgow Caledonian University

GCU launched a Learning Partnership with the Armed Forces, three city colleges and Glasgow's Helping Heroes. The scheme is open to Armed Forces personnel who have two years or less before leaving HM Forces and are considering a return to education to further develop their skills. The Scheme welcomes early Service leavers offering opportunities at a number of levels including National Certificate, HND, college foundation course or directly onto a degree programme. Applicants are invited to make a Recognition of Prior Learning claim, in recognition of previous learning, including that gained through life or work experiences.

Finding: There is a need to take a comprehensive look at the policies and support available in Scotland for opening access to Further and Higher Education for Service Leavers of all ages.

Health & Wellbeing

My overall impression from engagement with the ex-Service community, NHS Scotland champions, clinicians, third sector providers, policy makers and academics suggests that veterans, and those transitioning from the military in Scotland, typically have access to a high standard of health care. There are, of course, regional variations, but these should not detract from an overall impression of a system that combines the strengths of Public and Third Sector service providers to offer impressive support in many different areas. I am particularly encouraged that the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland have an overarching policy framework that provides a clear focus on the specific health needs of the Service community and is constantly striving to make improvements.

Consequently, this section of my report will focus less on the overall issues of Health and Well-being for Service Leavers in Scotland and focus more on a small number of specific topics that have come to my attention during the past six months. My plan is to include 'health', especially the issues surrounding the mental health of veterans, in future work but I also hope the following will identify one or two opportunities where advances can be made in the shorter term.

ACCESS TO MEDICAL RECORDS

The first of these issues concerns the process by which civilian GPs in Scotland can access the medical records of those who have been in the Services. In his report Lord Ashcroft specifically recommended that:

“NHS Scotland should follow England and Wales in automatically generating notification to a Service Leaver’s receiving civilian GP that their new patient has been under the care of DMS, and detailing how to obtain his or her military health record.”

The motivation behind such a proposal is very clear and welcome - to remove potential disadvantage to all Service Leavers no matter where they were living in the UK. However, the policy, delivery context, service configuration and protocols in Scotland appear quite different from the rest of the UK and it raises the question as to whether a similar effect can be achieved north of the border without wholesale change of current procedures. Through the combination of Service Leavers signing on with their GP (thereby notifying their previous military service), the availability of the FMed 133 and, most importantly, the dedicated advice available on the NHS Scotland INFORM website, GPs in Scotland are able to access military medical records. By all accounts this is a straightforward process that neither disadvantages Service Leavers in Scotland nor breaches protocols around consent that can arise through any sort of universal notification system.

Although I am reassured that this process satisfies the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant and Lord Ashcroft's recommendation, it is an area where the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland could help by keeping the process under review and updating advice for GPs when required.

Recommendation 13: The Scottish Government and NHS Scotland should retain the current procedures whereby GPs in Scotland retrieve Service Leavers' medical records but also keep them under review.

INFORMATION

Despite the availability of an impressive health care system that is immediately available to those leaving the Armed Forces in Scotland, it is clear that an individual's experience will depend heavily on their previous knowledge of the NHS, the routine for signing on with a GP (and dentist) and their understanding of the support they – and their families - can access as a Service Leaver from statutory services and the Third Sector.

Nowadays much of this information is available in pamphlets issued by different organisations and on numerous websites but I have heard regular criticism that this is often inaccessible, complex and confusing. As a result, the provision of information on health and well-being issues will be one of the key areas I will be investigating as part of my future work programme with the aim of identifying where improvements can be made. I hope this will highlight some of the current shortcomings and offer some solutions.

Finding: The provision of information on health and well-being issues for Service Leavers and veterans is seen as complex, confusing and inaccessible, and needs further study. Identifying ways to address this will be a priority in my future workplan.

RESEARCH

Under the heading of Health, Lord Ashcroft made a strong case for a curated research hub that can help develop our understanding of those issues affecting the ex-Service community. I am delighted that he has since collaborated with the Forces in Mind Trust to establish the **Veterans and Families Research Institute** at Anglia Ruskin University and will look forward to seeing the results of their research.

Given the many differences that affect the significant number of Service Leavers and veterans in Scotland it will also be important that the circumstances found north of the border feature regularly in the work of the Institute. In this way it should be possible to get a more complete picture of the future

needs of the ex-Service community, including those in Scotland. To this end I am keen to see the Scottish Government – and the academic community – engage closely with the institute and be prepared to share research, data and ideas.

Recommendation 14: The Scottish Government should engage with the Veterans and Families Research Institute at Anglia Ruskin University to help identify evidence needs and ensure research into transition in Scotland is also included in future programmes.

Finally under this heading I would like to highlight the important research being done in Scotland on veterans and the wider ex-Service community by Dr Beverley Bergman at the University of Glasgow. Her work, based on the records held by NHS Central Register, will lead to a far better understanding of the health of this group and the risks some may face as a result of their previous service or experiences. I am optimistic that such research will provide a vital evidential basis as Scotland decides how to support its ex-Servicemen and women in the future and plans future service provision.

MENTAL HEALTH

As widely recognised, Service personnel can experience the full range of mental health conditions that afflict their civilian counterparts. Fortunately, the unique needs of this cohort are now being recognised and many different support services, provided by the public and Third Sectors, are now available to those who need treatment. This also applies to veterans and those who have recently completed their service.

Reviewing the quality and availability of these services is well beyond the scope of this report but is likely to be the subject of further work next year. However, in view of the extensive consultation I have had on this topic it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the huge efforts made by many organisations – often working in partnership with colleagues from other sectors - to provide mental health services for veterans in of Scotland. There are many that could be singled out but I believe it important to highlight the work of Combat Stress and Veterans First Point, two collaborative ventures that combine the best of Local Authorities, charities and the NHS. Both are examples of what can be achieved with imagination and teamwork.

Veterans First Point (V1P)

... provides a one-stop shop for veterans and their families living in Lothian. Created in conjunction with veterans and run under the clinical direction of NHS Lothian, V1P offers information and advice, a dedicated team of peer support workers who are have all served in the Armed Forces, an experienced mental health team and access to wider NHS services. The V1P model is now being rolled out in other parts of Scotland and offers a vital service for those in the ex-Service community who need dedicated support.

Combat Stress

Through its facility at Hollybush House in Ayr, Combat Stress provides a range of specialist clinical, rehabilitation, social and welfare support, including a six-week intensive Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment programme for veterans resident in Scotland. I had the privilege of accompanying a Combat Stress community outreach worker on his visits, part of a service operating across Scotland to provide support tailored to the individually assessed mental health needs of the veteran.

ALCOHOL DEPENDENCY AND ISOLATION

Finally, I would like to raise two areas of concern that may be underestimated amongst our ex-Service communities in Scotland but I believe need closer scrutiny and wider awareness.

The first of these is the level of alcohol dependency amongst Service Leavers and veterans, particularly those who may be struggling to adjust to life as a civilian. Here, the evidence can often appear contradictory but where recent conversations with ex-Service personnel, clinicians, practitioners and support agencies indicate worrying levels of misuse amongst all age ranges and backgrounds. Those familiar with the problem acknowledge that any dependency may be well-hidden but have few doubts that it is a major contributor to many other long-lasting issues.

The second area of concern is one of social isolation, both as a cause and an effect of other issues. In this case it appears to be a recurring theme amongst those who have struggled to make a transition and cannot adjust to any sort of existence away from the discipline and camaraderie of the military life.

In both instances work will be required to identify the scale of any problem and to identify measures that can be taken to mitigate problems downstream. This will be yet another aspect of next year's workplan but, in the meantime, I would encourage the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to explore options for enhancing the levels of support to those who have left the Armed Forces and are known to be dependent on alcohol or suffering from social isolation.

Finding: The scale of alcohol dependency and social isolation amongst Service Leavers needs to be studied and measures identified to mitigate problems downstream. These are areas I will be exploring in next year's work programme.

INFORMATION & CO-ORDINATION

It is no surprise that reports on transition from both Lord Ashcroft and FiMT found the information available to Service Leavers across the UK to be disjointed, cluttered and unclear. I have already mentioned this in relation to housing and health in Scotland, and have heard regular complaints about the poor provision of information during many discussions with recent Service Leavers and those who have transitioned during the past few years. There is an obvious need to improve information provision and I support the findings and broad thrust of recommendations made on this aspect.

“The landscape is confusing. For those who leave the Services, there are resources available, but(t)here is no central conduit for information for ex-Service personnel trying to navigate the sector”

Forces in Mind Trust – Transition Mapping Study

“Despite the quantity of information, or perhaps because of it, individuals can struggle to find out what they need to know.”

Lord Ashcroft’s Veterans Transitions Review

It is not my purpose to comment on the quality of the information and briefings provided to Service Leavers prior to discharge but I am acutely aware of the vast amounts of information available on-line and in pamphlets produced by the Ministry of Defence, UK (and Scottish) Government departments, Local Authorities, the NHS and third sector service providers. In this, Service Leavers in Scotland find themselves in a very similar situation to colleagues in the rest of the UK. Whilst much of this information is accurate and pertinent, the sheer extent often proves to be one of the biggest barriers to using it effectively and efficiently. It will always be a complex task to make information like this more accessible but in my role as Scottish Veterans Commissioner I would urge any organisation adding to this compendium to do so with care, avoiding duplication whilst taking every opportunity to share links and present material in as simple a fashion as possible.

VETERANS SCOTLAND AND THIRD SECTOR

Although Service Leavers in Scotland have similar challenges accessing information to their counterparts in the rest of the UK, I sense they are fortunate to have a number of advantages based on the overall size of the community, the close relationship that exists between various sectors who

provide support and the growing utility of information services offered by the likes of **Veterans Scotland**.

Veterans Scotland

... is an umbrella organisation, representing more than 50 Ex-Service charities in Scotland. It works to promote the welfare of the veterans' community in Scotland by facilitating collaborative working between its member charities, distributing information and the coordinating joint approaches to policy makers, public services and the private sector.

The Scottish Government works particularly closely with Veterans Scotland across the spectrum of devolved policy issues affecting the Ex-Service community. Although a member of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO), Veterans Scotland has a significantly stronger presence in Scotland and is well-placed to represent the views of the sector north of the border. They also play a leading role in co-ordinating information and advice about the support available to Service Leavers who choose to settle in Scotland, providing links through their **Veterans Assist** website and promoting the use of portals provided by **NHS Scotland and Citizens Advice Scotland**. I, and others, see this as a vital contribution and one that should remain the backbone of our shared ambition to ensure that all Service Leavers can access the support and information they need.

Veterans Scotland

... operates the Veterans Assist web portal, which provides a range of information and links to support organisations across Scotland. The intention is that the site will put in one place most of the resources veterans and their families might need, including education, housing, pensions, employment and more.

Veterans Health Zone

...on the NHS Inform web portal provides information on specific NHS support for veterans in Scotland, as well as wider programmes and initiatives. Information is also available for health professionals and family members, on how best to signpost and treat veterans in need of primary and secondary health care.

The Armed Services Advice Project (ASAP)

...provides dedicated information, advice and support on benefits, debt, employment, relationships and housing to serving and former members of the Armed Forces Community in Scotland. Provided by the Scottish Citizens Advice Bureau Service, and funded by Poppyscotland and partners, ASAP provides a dedicated helpline service as well as face-to-face advice and support

As Commissioner, my role is not to force through rationalisation or dictate communications with, or for, our veterans. There are good links, well-developed networks and a wealth of useful information already available to Service Leavers. I do not intend to explore this complex issue in any detail, but I do want to make a plea that we not reinvent the wheel. My preference will always be to build on these assets to improve quality, utility and accessibility, resisting the urge to throw out established mechanisms and create new structures. I fully recognise that much more can be done but would prefer to see improved information and co-ordination through partnership and collaboration with a range of partners, especially Local Authorities, Veterans Scotland and those from the Third Sector.

Finding: Links between the public and Third Sectors are strong in Scotland and these should be exploited and developed to improve the profile and accessibility of current information provision. Improving communication, building on and enhancing – rather than reinventing – existing information sources will be a recurring theme in my future work.

PARTNERSHIP AND CO-ORDINATION

There is a strong tradition of partnership working within the Scottish veterans sector and through my programme of visits and engagements, I have become increasingly convinced that the most successful and effective initiatives are those based on strong collaboration and co-ordination. Some are grounded in formal partnership arrangements, others in shared resources through funding agreements or co-location while many more operate through informal networks of contacts and relationships. The following are examples of cross-sectoral working and collaboration that have come to my attention – they are an impressive selection of what can be achieved.

Scottish Veterans Residences (SVR)

... works in partnership with Combat Stress to provide mental health support for its residents and works with Shelter to ensure ongoing housing support and outreach service for veterans who have moved into mainstream accommodation.

PoppyScotland

As part of their campaign to raise awareness of veterans and their families in the criminal justice system, a recent Poppyscotland conference brought together organisations including the Scottish Prison Service, Police Scotland, ASAP, the Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (SACRO), SSAFA and Veterans First Point. This was an impressive event that demonstrated the extensive partnership arrangements that exist within this area.

Glasgow's Helping Heroes

... is a unique partnership between SSAFA Forces Help and Glasgow City Council. Based in council premises, its staff are SSAFA employees. Since 2010, Glasgow's Helping Heroes has provided support to more than 1300 veterans with a total estimated cost benefit of providing holistic support to veterans to meet their housing and employment needs of over £30 million.

These initiatives demonstrate how support can be enhanced and expanded through collaboration and shared endeavour. The sharing of knowledge, innovation, resources and effort typically yield far greater results and we need to encourage use of this approach in designing support for those veterans transitioning in Scotland. I would like to see many more collaborations particularly between the public, third and even private sectors and especially so at a local level.

COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIPS (CPPs)

At this local level, I have also been reassured to see some very effective partnership arrangements built around the Firm Base network and Community Covenant partnerships. In discussions with Local Authorities from Highland, Argyll & Bute and East Renfrewshire, I have also been introduced to the benefits and potential for further collaboration, if issues were to be raised through Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)⁸. This confirms a growing belief that local variations promote innovation and often lead to more relevant and pragmatic solutions.

However, it is not yet clear to me whether issues regarding Service Leavers and the broader veterans' community feature consistently in CPP joint plans and priorities. I look forward to exploring this further.

Finding: More work is needed to understand and enhance the role of CPPs in supporting our Service Leavers and I look forward to raising this in discussion with Local Authority Veterans Champions over the coming months.

PUBLIC SECTOR CHAMPIONS

In the drive to provide information, improve co-ordination and deliver support for those transitioning from the Armed Forces, there are many important players and I want to pay special tribute to the individuals from Scotland's 32 Local Authorities, NHS Scotland, Police Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service and Job Centre Plus, who have taken on the role of champions for the interests of Ex-Service

⁸ Community planning (CP) is the process by which Local Authorities and other public bodies work together, with their communities, businesses and voluntary groups, to plan and deliver better services and improve outcomes for their area. **Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs)** bring together the statutory CP partners to jointly plan, resource and deliver local priorities and services.

personnel within their organisations. I have had the privilege to meet a number of very effective champions and have been hugely impressed by their vision and commitment. Their role has been one of the successes stemming from the Armed Forces Covenant, particularly in Scotland.

There are differences in the way the role of champion is discharged across Scotland and I strongly believe that these local variations are a strength. The Champions have an important role to play in improving support for Service Leavers and veterans but I have some concerns that some can be remote from those involved in frontline delivery. This has been addressed in organisations like Police Scotland by the designation of several locally based champions, who will be working with Community Policing Teams across the country. Similarly, the appointment of a Veterans Co-ordinator in South Clyde, working under the local Veterans Champions (see below), has been instrumental in disseminating training, guidance and good practice to frontline staff.

East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Council

... with the support of Firm Base and the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS), collaborated on a new customer service initiative to ensure Service Leavers receive the help they need. Under the guidance of their dedicated Veterans Co-ordinator, customer service advisors at all 3 authorities have been trained as "mini champions", to ask the right questions to identify veterans and 'signpost' them to specialist advice in housing, employment, benefits or medical treatment.

Finding: There is an opportunity to build on the valuable support provided by Veterans Champions in many of Scotland's public services. To that end, I will work with Champions over the coming year to support capacity building and strengthen networks.

Looking to the Future

As I have discovered more about the transition process in Scotland and the challenges Service Leavers and their families face as they complete their military careers, I have been struck by the extent, and sophistication, of the support that is available from different quarters. It is reassuring that so many organisations – from all sectors and from all parts of the UK – are committed to helping the ex-Service community during what can often be a difficult period. Whilst it will always be relatively easy to criticise aspects of this support, we must remember that significant progress has been made in the past few years and that our Service personnel are now treated with considerably more dignity, compassion and care than has ever been the case in the past.

However, discussions with a broad range of partners and stakeholders in Scotland have also convinced me that there are still gaps in this provision and areas where further improvements are possible. These must be addressed. I have also come to the conclusion, with the help of many others, that this may be the time for a more fundamental shift in the way we perceive and treat veterans in Scotland, reversing a narrative that tends to view them through the prism of need and obligation, and encouraging society to recognise them far more for their strengths and qualities.

Clearly and undeniably, some in the ex-Service community will always need specific support to allow them to adjust to transition, deal with health issues or cope with life in a civilian world. These people deserve and must get the help they require. But, more broadly, veterans should also be seen as valued and valuable members of society, with an expectation that their outstanding skills and attributes can make a major contribution to Scotland's economy and its communities.

To ensure such a change becomes embedded in our culture and attitude towards the military there is a need for strong leadership and direction.

The Scottish Government has a well-defined role to play in setting this agenda and shifting the policy framework, but many more organisations and individuals must be involved if these ideas are to take root. For my part, I intend embarking on a programme of consultation with veterans, business leaders and academics, as well as public and Third Sector organisations, over the summer and autumn that should help inform this work. I hope this will be a collaborative exercise – a conversation and active debate – where there is a shared determination to develop alternative language surrounding veterans and a common desire to realise the full potential of these individuals and their families.

How Should Scotland Perceive and Treat its Veterans?

- *Greater equality for all in the ex-Service community – that means tackling the inequalities that can arise from discrimination against those with a connection to the military, where that exists or, as is more often the case, negative perceptions of those who have served. If we are really to remove disadvantage in the spirit of the Armed Forces Covenant then we must tackle that prejudice head on.*
- *Greater acknowledgement of the contribution that Service Leavers and their families can make - we need to recognise, not only the contribution they have made in serving their country, but also the tremendous opportunities they have to make a positive impact in workplaces and communities. Unlocking that potential and supporting that contribution is just as important as paying tribute to past service.*
- *Greater opportunities for all – this means, not only ensuring that those leaving the Services have the means and opportunity to access the support to which they're entitled, but also providing opportunities for veterans to make the most of their strengths and skills. These are skills that Scotland must harness to help grow our economy and ensure our communities continue to flourish.*

As this engagement and discussion takes shape it seems likely that it will increasingly reflect what I have seen of the Scottish approach to Government – one that is grounded on partnership, prevention, improvement and an emphasis on seeing veterans as an “asset” or “resource”. This isn’t just new jargon but a decisive shift in focus and method that marks a fundamental change in the way we feel towards veterans in Scotland.

..... AND FINALLY

This report set out to take a close look at the recent work on transition in the context of what is happening in Scotland and suggest where we can do more to help those who are leaving the Armed Forces and decide to settle here. It covers a significant amount of ground but, in essence, can be distilled into the following conclusions.

The first is to stress that the work done by Lord Ashcroft, FiMT and others has greatly enhanced our understanding of the challenges faced by those undergoing the transition process and identified numerous areas where improvements can be made. Many are applicable right across the UK and will make a significant difference if implemented – including in Scotland. These are very welcome.

However, closer to home, it also has to be recognised that the Scottish political, administrative and cultural landscape is quite different from the rest of the UK. This has a profound impact on Service Leavers who have to engage with a range of devolved public services that operate quite differently from their southern counterparts. While this can cause difficulties for those less familiar with the

system in Scotland, it also offers many unique opportunities in the areas of health, housing, employability and education.

There is also plenty of evidence of good practice across all sectors in Scotland that need to be emphasised; several examples are included in this report. These provide first-class support to many as well as a solid foundation for the future. However, it will also be no surprise that there are areas where more immediate improvements are possible. These are highlighted as a series of recommendations, most of which focus on improving the provision of information and making minor changes to public policy that reduce the risk of longer-term disadvantage to Service Leavers and their families. Much of this is about 'joining the dots' and encouraging greater awareness amongst those who develop the policy, deliver support and those who need it.

I sense that Scotland is determined to welcome all those who have served – including their families – but if that welcome is to be truly open and meaningful our public services, workplaces and communities must stand ready to receive them. I applaud the current drive and commitment to making this so and look forward to seeing Scotland becoming a destination of choice for Service Leavers and a country that makes the most of their strengths, skills and attributes.