

Positive Futures

Getting Transition
Right in Scotland





Foreword

In my first year as Scottish Veterans Commissioner, the one issue that has been raised with me more often than all others is “transition”. This is closely followed by the related issue of “communication” – either the lack of it or the inconsistencies in it.

As a veteran now myself, I appreciate more than ever the need to start to consider your life after the Services early in your Military career. For each of us our transition journey is unique – we all have different needs and aspirations which will require different degrees of information, advice and support.

It is clear to me that there is a plethora of information out there and a vast array of people who want to offer help and support. Many people work tirelessly and selflessly for our veterans. But getting the right support or advice to the right person at the right time is a real challenge. Transition can be particularly harshly felt when so many aspects of an individual’s life change at the same time. The complex nature of transition can also lead to miscommunication or misunderstandings which can leave individuals feeling vulnerable and isolated.

For those who struggle with these challenges the timely availability of appropriate quality support is crucial. When systems fail at the beginning, the chances of the right connections being made further down the line are lessened and outcomes poorer. Making sure services and support are consistent and there when needed will help ensure successful outcomes for veterans, their families, and the communities in which they live.

If we define a successful transition by the need to get the fundamentals of life in place on leaving the Services – securing a job and finding somewhere to live – then the vast majority of service leavers can be said to have made a successful transition. However, we do not currently measure the other components of transition such as long-term independence, financial security, meaningful and appropriate employment, social integration or health and wellbeing. Nor do we consider the opportunity cost to the labour market and the economy of Service leavers who are not enabled to maximise their talents.

It is time to change the narrative. Now we must focus on the positive qualities our veterans bring to society. It is my hope that this paper will encourage conversations amongst all those who work with and for our veterans. I hope it will also filter out to those who might not have any direct experience of the military and may not be aware of the talent that is on offer amongst the many Service leavers and their families who choose to settle in Scotland each year.

I would like to thank all those individuals and organisations who have helped inform this work, and especially my predecessor, Eric Fraser who did so much to get the challenges our veterans face to the forefront of our collective conscience. It is really heartening to see first-hand the support for our veterans and their families which exists and is given so generously. Now is the time to capitalise on this and make best use of the talents veterans have which can benefit not only themselves, but all of Scotland.

Charles Wallace
Scottish Veterans Commissioner

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Aim and Introduction

This paper aims to:

- offer a strategic overview of transition from the Armed Forces against the current economic, demographic and social backdrop, bringing up-to-date and developing the work of the Commissioner.
- set the scene for a series of short thematic papers, which will look in more detail at specific aspects of transition. These will offer pointers and outcomes-based recommendations on:
 - ways to improve the services and support designed to help veterans and their families transition well and go on to live rewarding and fulfilling civilian lives in Scotland;
 - ensuring our communities and employers are best prepared to receive and support veterans as real assets to the community and the Scottish workforce.

The Oxford English dictionary defines transition as ‘a process of changing from one state or condition to another’. I can think of few other circumstances where so many changes are experienced all at the same time, as when individuals and their families go through transition from the military to civilian life.

My predecessor’s *Transition in Scotland*¹ report published in 2015, made a number of recommendations to the Scottish Government and I am pleased to say that my 2019 *Progress Report* analysis² shows that many of these recommendations have been, or are in the process of being, implemented. This is good news.

However, things move on and it is a challenge for us all to keep up to date with the economic, societal and technological changes that are a sign of our times. I now want to look again at transition against that broader background. My purpose is to bring up to date the thinking and recommendations from the *Transition in Scotland* report. Set in the fresh context of the first ever UK-wide, long-term *Strategy for our Veterans*³ my work will be informed by my independent analysis of the progress made in delivering the recommendations from the 2015 report and what the 2019 public consultation on the UK Strategy tells us.

This scene-setting paper makes no specific recommendations for government. Rather, it expresses a number of observations. It introduces some fresh thinking and propositions for change or improvement which I will be developing further in a series of thematic papers aimed at getting transition right and securing positive futures for veterans in Scotland.

1. https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20150529111037mp_/http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474235.pdf

2. <https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/sgprogress/>

3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/755915/Strategy_for_our_Veterans_FINAL_08.11.18_WEB.pdf



ROYAL
NAVY

In introducing this paper, I am mindful of the many conversations I have had over my first year as Commissioner. I have engaged with many different organisations across Scotland and of course, with veterans themselves. Their thoughts are reflected in my thinking in the pages that follow but I wanted to highlight upfront the following key concerns raised with me, which stand out as prevalent:

- Start the transition process early
- Involve partners and family members
- Improve alignment of military experience & qualifications with civilian skills & qualifications
- Improve support for Early Service Leavers (ESLs) including financial planning and awareness

1. Start Early

Some reports and individuals suggest transition should start almost from the day someone joins up. I think this is right. No-one knows how long their service career will last, or how and for what reason they will leave – but as the 2018 Tri-service Family Federations report, *Lifting the Lid on Transition*⁴ states – “unexpected doesn’t have to mean unplanned”.

Making transition an integral part of Service life seems to me to be eminently sensible. If we can get our service people to realise that transition is not just something that happens to them at the end of their time in the Armed Forces, and if we can generate a shift towards an understanding of transition as a holistic process by decision makers, then I think we have a better chance of making a successful transition the norm for everyone.

In particular, ESLs and those who require more help and support due to medical discharge, would likely benefit from better preparation for life outside the Armed Forces. Currently ESLs receive less re-settlement support than those who have served for a longer period of time, despite evidence showing that some are more at risk of having a ‘poor’ transition – is this sensible?

Whether, and to what extent, transition should be included as an integral part of Service life is ultimately for the MOD and the three Services to decide and is not within the scope of this paper. **However, I am keen to add my voice to those asking decision makers to look at incorporating transition more fully into Service life, rather than as an ‘add on’ towards the end of someone’s time in the military.**

2. Involve the Family

Anyone who has been through transition knows very well that these life changes involve the whole family, not just the Service leaver. Traditionally, all three Services and the MOD have focussed almost exclusively on the Service leaver. This needs to change.

Families need, and want, to be much more involved in the transition process. The various elements which make up transition – housing, employment, skills development, further learning and healthcare are things which affect the whole family. This message is strongly articulated in the *Lifting the Lid on Transition* report mentioned earlier.



Please stop relying on (the Service Person) to channel information to families.

4. <https://www.fim-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Transition-Final-Report-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf>



As spouses, we need to be better prepared.

No one ever asks you, as the wife, if you need anything.



Speaking to other families who have left was our main source of help.

Friends who have already experienced transition are really important.

3. Improve the Alignment of Military and Civilian Experience, Skills and Qualifications

A recent YouGov survey for the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT)⁵ revealed that 18% of executives with hiring responsibilities would discriminate against veterans due to “negative perceptions” of their former careers. Of these negative perceptions, the most common is that veterans do not have the relevant skills or experience (44%). This is followed by a belief that they may not fit the culture of the workplace (19%); skills from active duty may not translate into a business environment (18%); or they may have different levels of education from those expected of civilian workers (11%).

Aligning military and civilian skills and qualifications, allowing employers to see the relevance of what ex-service personnel bring with them as potential employees, is work which has been ongoing for a number of years and now needs to be completed as soon as possible.

Work is continuing on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) project, mapping and accrediting prior learning for Service leavers and veterans.

The SCQFP work is commendable, however, the project is still a long way from being completed - the task is huge and the pace is slow. While Scotland has known skills gaps and veterans need employment, we need to encourage all parties, particularly the awarding bodies, to pick up the pace to ensure all qualifications gained during military service are mapped onto the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

The mapping of military qualifications also has important implications for those who wish to pursue further and/or higher education and I am keen to see more ex-service personnel consider this as a viable option. Encouraging serving personnel to consider this potential route at an early point in their transition journey could have considerable benefits and mean better job prospects for them when they do finally leave.



I also think greater understanding of how our skills could be adapted for jobs outside the army among both service leavers and potential employers would be very beneficial, and perhaps help open more doors for veterans and improve their performance at interviews.

5. <https://www.fim-trust.org/news/veterans-face-negative-stereotypes-when-applying-for-jobs/>



We're bad at selling ourselves and we underestimate our skills because we can't see how they fit in the civilian world. A civilian friend rewrote my CV for me and I didn't recognise the person they were writing about.



I was so ignorant of what was outside of the Army. I knew I had skills but I had no idea of how they would work in industry, what kind of jobs would suit me, or what opportunities there were.

4. Improve Support for ESLs, Including Financial Planning

Early Service Leavers are defined as those who have completed less than four years' service, or are compulsorily discharged. A number of reports and pieces of academic research show that compared to those who leave after a longer period of time, ESLs are more likely to be at risk of a 'poor transition'.⁶

A number of factors can contribute to this, for example:

- the often rapid nature of discharge for ESLs which creates a potential problem in enabling provision of support in preparation for transition
- the tendency for ESLs not to engage in the support offered to them - ESLs have been described as "a group who is most in need of support but least likely to engage" (Royal British Legion)
- lumping all ESLs in together when there are significant differences between them. Such as, those who have completed basic training and those who have not, or those who leave voluntarily rather than being compulsorily discharged
- identifying at what point vulnerabilities and problems arise for ESLs. Did these exist before joining the military, or did they develop as a result of service?

Prior to joining, these young men and women may not have had a job, or lived anywhere independently. They may not have had to budget, find a GP, rent a flat, or pay utility bills. All normal life skills many of their contemporaries will have had the time to acquire by the same age. This can leave young Service leavers poorly prepared for life outside the Armed Forces.

Coupled with the possibility that some of them will leave with physical or mental health problems, (either from their time in the forces, or prior to joining) and you can see the potential for things to go wrong for a number of vulnerable young veterans. ESLs will spend many more years as civilians than they will have spent in uniform, and while the MOD's Future Horizons programme⁷ delivered by the Careers Transition Partnership is a welcome step in the right direction, I feel there is more we can and should do.

The MOD works extremely hard to ensure our Armed Forces are equipped and trained to be among the best in the world. While it recognises its responsibilities in preparing Service leavers for life outside the military, **I wish to add my voice to those asking decision makers to look afresh at what the transition process offers ESLs. We owe it to all our Service leavers and their families, to ensure they are equipped with the required skills and knowledge to make a success of their lives once they are out of uniform.**

6. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316672064_Transition_Support_for_Vulnerable_Service_Leavers_in_the_UK_Providing_Care_for_Early_Service_Leavers (Ashcroft, 2014; Buckman et al., 2013; National Audit Office, 2007; The Futures Company, 2013).

7. <https://www.ctp.org.uk/futurehorizons>



The Baseline

Current Needs and Numbers

'Transition' is the term commonly used to describe the period of change around reintegration into civilian life from the Armed Forces.

The number of those transitioning back to civilian life each year is significant. In the 12 months to December 2018, 14,700 personnel left the regular Armed Forces across the UK⁸ and every one of these men and women are of working age. Of these, it is estimated that up to 1,800 ex-service personnel will settle in Scotland annually, along with their partners and families.⁹

Those leaving the UK Armed Forces from December 2017 to December 2018

3,139

...from the Royal Navy



9,102

...from the Army



2,457

...from the RAF



**Up to 1,800 ex-service
personnel and their families will
settle in Scotland annually**

It is not only individuals who stand to gain from a successful transition, but each year, our labour market and economy also stands to gain when this regular flow of talent transitions well.

The veterans population in Scotland is estimated to be around 240,000 and while the majority are currently over the age of 65, (as a result of the Second World War and subsequent National Service) by 2028 it is estimated that almost half of all veterans will be of working age. This demographic change means there will also be a change in the types of services and support they will need and the sorts of skills they will bring when they return to a civilian life.

For some time now there has been a growing dialogue around transition and its importance in securing positive futures. As recently as five or six years ago, most published research and analysis on the challenges of transition focused quite rightly on the needs of those returning from conflicts, and on the physical and mental injuries they may have suffered.

Circumstances have changed and will continue to change, and most Service leavers now approach transition with a wide range of needs and aspirations. These require a broad and flexible response and a range of services and support to help them realise their personal aims and ambitions and to transition well.

Many Service leavers have partners and/or families to consider. Transition affects the entire family and adequate, accessible support for them should be embedded into the transition process. Some families will require very minimal advice and guidance and will be more or less self-sufficient, others will need more support and some may face serious difficulties, requiring much greater intervention.

The challenge for government and society is to set the right conditions for a seamless transition, where individual needs and aspirations can be supported flexibly and consistently. If we can get this right, then not only the Service leaver, but the labour market, our communities and society in general will reap the benefits of a diverse and very often high-performing source of talent.

In order to rise to that challenge, transition services and support processes need to be flexible and built around individual needs. Scotland has the capability of delivering this approach, which aligns with the Scottish Government's ambitions for its wellbeing economy and the person-centred focus it has to policy delivery in key areas like health and social care.

8. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2019>

9. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61111/Report_v3_webNH.PDF

The Current Transition Process

Transition is inevitable and unavoidable. All servicemen and women will transition with a particular set of life experiences, behaviours, talents and skills which ought to be attractive to civilian employers and society in general. The transition timeframe is fluid and that can cause confusion over expectations of where, when and how it happens and where exactly the responsibilities lie.

More often than not, transition is seen as the specific point at which service personnel embark on the Armed Forces formal resettlement processes - usually two years prior to leaving the military – in line with the Tri-Service Resettlement & Employment Manual (JSP 534)¹⁰.

The nature of their work means the vast majority of Service personnel are resilient, and for most, their transition to 'civvy street' will be relatively straightforward. This, despite the stress and uncertainty of having to cope with many different life changes all at once. Facing and adapting to so much change means that a degree of anxiety around transition is normal.

For some, if they are not properly prepared and given the right information, good advice and support to make informed choices, this may prove to be a very difficult period of their lives. There may also be missed opportunities, for example, for further learning, better career choices or in acquiring a home best suited to their needs. However, it is important to re-iterate that the majority of servicemen and women will transition successfully. But success can be defined and measured in different ways.

The MOD recognises that this period can be challenging, and invests in comprehensive resettlement programmes, comprising careers guidance, skills development and job finding assistance, delivered on their behalf by the Careers Development Partnership (CTP).¹¹ For the CTP, success is contract driven. It is defined by quantitative criteria which drive action and priorities. Put simply, we inevitably have success being measured by outputs, i.e. by the numbers of veterans in employment at given points after leaving the military.

An extra layer of support will be added with the introduction of the MOD's new Defence Transition Services (DTS)¹². Focussed on supporting the most vulnerable as they leave service, it will offer a more holistic package, beyond a focus on employment, to a specific group of individuals.

At the time of writing, we have yet to see the detailed model or success criteria but if it is driven by metrics that measure success by actions and outputs rather than outcomes, there is a danger that opportunities for improvement will be lost. The DTS will be just one element of the new Defence Holistic Transition Policy¹³, which will offer guidance and best practice for the three Services across a number of key areas of transition, and will for the first time, include the transition of families.

From the perspective of a Service leaver, success is not about hitting quite narrowly focussed government targets, such as securing a job and remaining in it for 6 months. In reality, his or her concerns are more broadly drawn around the fundamentals that make for a safe, secure and happy life.

A 'good transition' is made possible by the Service leaver and their family being engaged early, clear about 'ownership' and supported by a well-structured framework of support which he/she can easily navigate in line with their own needs and aspirations.

10. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/465794/20151001-JSP_534_Issue_14_TESRR_FINAL-O__3_.pdf

11. <https://www.ctp.org.uk/>

12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-service-leavers-and-their-families>

13. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843852/20191028_JSP_100_V1.0_Oct_2019_-_Final.pdf



When I was asked by my Resettlement Officer what I wanted to do on leaving the Army, it was the first time in 11 years that I'd had to make a decision for myself. Thinking about that next step definitely felt big and daunting.



It got to the point when I only had a couple of months to find something, or I was going to be leaving without a job on the other side. My dad suggested I apply to the council for a taxi licence as a back-up until I found something else.



I'd heard lots of stories about it being a handshake and goodbye, but my experience has been far from that. My wife is drumming her fingers about the move back to Scotland so we can get on with the next stage of our lives.



I got a job but it wasn't a challenge. I was becoming complacent with it. I was getting up in the morning and there was no 'Yes, I'm going to work'" – Male, Voluntary Early Release Army.



Transition for Positive Futures



Broader Conditions and Developments

It is widely acknowledged that support for Service leavers has improved steadily in recent years; current preparation for leaving stands in stark contrast to that described by many older veterans. Yet transition from military to civilian life remains a key focus of attention and concerns about the experience continue to be raised by our veterans. That suggests we are still not getting it quite right.

Indeed, consultation on the 2018 *Strategy for our Veterans* highlighted again the fundamental importance the transition process plays in ensuring those leaving the Services adjust and settle into their new lives as civilians in as seamless a way as possible. It also highlighted the opportunity we have to improve support for particular groups of Service leavers.

Since deciding to look afresh at transition, I have been struck by the number and variety of reports which have been published over the last four to five years. Lord Ashcroft's comprehensive *Veterans Transition Review* was published in 2014 and then followed by three annual follow up reports and the creation of a Veterans Transition Review website¹⁴ which brought all the Ashcroft reports together. Specifically for Scotland, this was followed in 2015 by my predecessor, Eric Fraser's detailed report, *Transition in Scotland*, and its recommendations for the Scottish Government.

There have been many other excellent reports, written or commissioned by different organisations which I have examined and considered in the process of writing this paper. These organisations have looked at many different aspects of transition and include; the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), SSAFA, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Leadership and Management and the Armed Forces Families Federations.

Helpfully, much of this recent research makes similar key deductions and proposals on what needs to change to keep up with economic and societal shifts and the changing nature of work; as well as the varying demands and expectations of Service people, their partners and families. From that work, the following observations in relation to the process of transition and why it must continue to develop, stand out:

- Transition is a journey – not a single process or a point in time – which impacts on many aspects of life, not just employment
- Transition is a shared responsibility of the individual and their employer
- Transition for the individual should start at 'sign-on', 'not sign-off'
- Individuals should be put at the centre of the approach and their distinct needs and aspirations should be taken into account
- Local military line management needs to be fully on board
- Transition planning and support need to consider and include partners and where appropriate families, not just the Service leaver
- Veterans are valued assets and a positive source of talent
- Veterans should be supported and empowered to develop and make informed choices
- Account should be taken of the changing labour market and 'world of work' which have become more transient
- More support, not less, is needed for Early Service Leavers – especially if they leave at short notice

14. <http://www.veteranstransition.co.uk/>

Future thinking about transition needs to take account of the demographic changes that lie ahead, as well as developments already in hand and the resource implications for services and support.

New and emerging policies from the MOD will have an impact on the behaviours of those still serving and on recruitment and retention of Service personnel. I expect we will see the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) and the New Employment Model (NEM) fundamentally change the relationship between the employer (Navy, Army or RAF) and the individual employee (the Service person). These policies will give more lifestyle choices – and personal responsibilities – to the individual. This in turn may drive a significant change in behaviours from the Service person during their Service.

This change in the balance of responsibilities will impact on the way serving personnel and new veterans see transition and reinforces the need for a shift in focus that sees the individual put at the centre, with transition services and support designed around their needs, rather than determined by existing systems or processes.

These new MOD policies will potentially have an effect on many of the devolved responsibilities of the Scottish Government and its delivery partners. For example, on housing provision, on schools, further and higher education and learning services, and on employment and skills development for both individuals and their partners and families.

Therefore, it is important that the close collaboration between Governments seen in the preparation of the ‘Strategy for Our Veterans’ continues. Our UK and devolved Governments must engage positively with each other in order to ensure local delivery circumstances are reflected in policy development and design. Ultimately, this will help secure more positive outcomes for our veterans and their families.

Different priorities, needs and preferences will influence a person’s choices. For example - an individual may be concerned principally with securing a suitable home in a location close to the right sort of job opportunities or which allows their partner to continue their career. An injured veteran may be most concerned in making sure they can continue to get the right support to enable them to live independently.

Transition support should be designed to enable informed choices and to help build habits of independence that can help Service leavers adjust to the demands of the civilian world. Those habits would be better forged from the beginning of a military career.



Leaving the Army gave us the stability for (my wife) to start her own company which she wouldn't have been able to do before.



All veterans have completely different experiences and needs, and have different ways of adjusting to the civilian world.

Understanding our Armed Forces

The differences between military and civilian life are often underestimated. Even for those Service leavers who have planned their transition carefully and well in advance, the cultural differences - including the requirement to take personal responsibility for aspects of their lives they may not yet have had to consider - can come as a surprise.

While good transition support can help prepare Service leavers, what it cannot do is prepare communities to welcome them and see them for the assets to society that they are. By communities I mean all the people in a particular locality a Service leaver may come in contact with. That includes: employers, local businesses, statutory service providers like health practitioners, as well as a wide variety of community organisations, and 3rd sector services and support bodies.

This is challenging and important to address, as increasingly I perceive a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Armed Forces in our society. This is understandable when we live in a comparatively peaceful country, where day to day external threats to the majority of individuals are minimal. Nowadays, fewer people than ever have a direct connection to, or an appreciation of, Service life and day to day contact with those in the military is uncommon except perhaps, for those living in or near Service bases.

Unless society is better informed about why we need an armed force and about the benefits of serving in the Armed Forces, then it is understandable that there are those who may view Service leavers as 'separate' from civilian society. It is a significant stretch to shift thinking from that viewpoint to seeing Service leavers as assets to our communities and positive sources of talent.

I think there is a challenge here for governments across the UK to help foster a better understanding of why we need an armed force and what it means to be a member of it in the 21st century. We need to break down the myths and misconceptions that have grown up if we are to help society see through to the talent that flows from our Armed Forces year in, year out and to embrace that more fully.

The term 'veteran' also poses a challenge to public understanding and appreciation of ex-service personnel. The civilian population often perceive veterans as a distinct group of older individuals. It is common to see public pride in these older veterans, and that is as it should be. However, it is also clear that younger veterans, and particularly those of working age, do not often feature in the minds of the public, unless as physically or mentally harmed individuals from more recent conflicts. Yet, already, some 37% of UK veterans are of working age and within the next ten years, that is projected to increase to 44%¹⁵.

By 2028 almost half of veterans will be of working age.



15. Population_Projections_-_UK_Armed_Forces_Veterans_residing_in_Great_Britain_-_2016_to_2028



There is a challenge for all of government here in leading a change to the narrative. This needs to move from unhelpful perceptions and out-dated stereo-types - which may limit not only veterans' opportunities, but employers and others from reaping the benefits of a positive source of talent - to a broad general recognition of the value of our veterans and their families.

There are wider considerations for government in improving both public perceptions of the Armed Forces and our veterans and in ensuring the transition process is up to-date. It must serve the needs of Service personnel and their families well, but also align to the needs of society and the labour market.

Getting it right could also assist in the sustainability of a careers model that meets the current and future needs of our Armed Forces. A model that fits more closely with the changes we are seeing in the wider world of work, including the tendency for people to move in and out of jobs more regularly and sustain more than one career in their working lives.

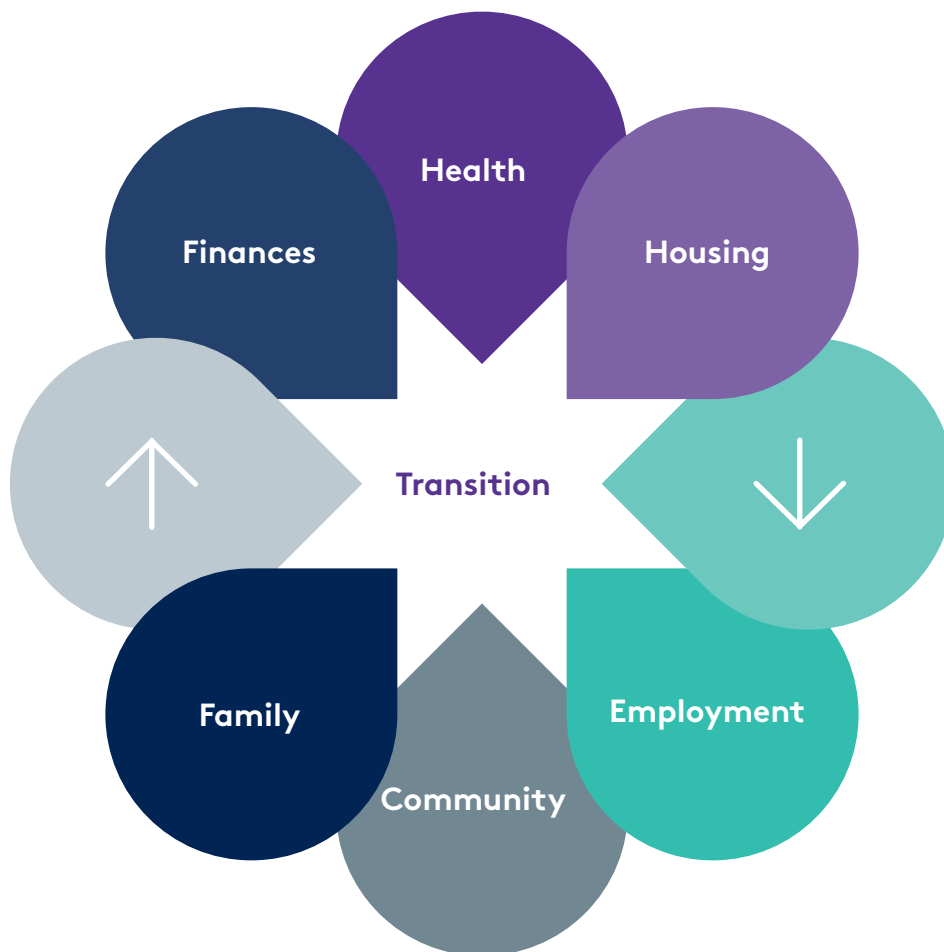
A 'Good Transition'... a Shared Responsibility


A 'good transition' is an undefined concept but I think most would agree that it is about ensuring our veterans and their families are sufficiently resilient to adapt successfully to civilian life and are empowered to make informed choices to realise their full potential.

The transition journey that each serviceman or women undertakes is unique to that individual, it is their journey and they have the biggest part to play in it. But there are certain elements which are common to all, including preparation, practicalities and the process and support systems set in place around it.

None of the elements which make up transition sit in isolation, the subject is complex, cross cutting and involves a number of different considerations. The inter-relationships between employment, housing, health and wellbeing, finances, family and community are obvious, and so too is the fact that if a problem arises in one area of someone's life, it will often spill over into other areas as well.

Component parts of transition





Getting these different elements – or ‘in-puts’ – right at the outset will help secure long-term positive outcomes, for the individual and his/her family, and for broader society, our communities and the economy. Get it wrong and a poor transition can stack-up problems in later years, including in the worst cases, relationship breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and serious health problems.

The benefits of a good transition and the problems which may stem from a poor transition are fairly obvious. Less so are the reasons why some people will struggle and others do not and where their problems lie. Despite the fact that there has been a good deal of progress in recent years and a rich seam of support exists, I still hear from veterans, their families and others, that for some, a successful transition has not been possible. This may be for a number of different reasons including:

- Transition can be a complicated process, which can be made worse if it only starts towards the end of an individual’s service.
- It is not always well understood by those going through the process with information and support not as well sign-posted as it could be and for some there are limitations to ‘the offer’ (including financial barriers).
- Those leaving the Armed Forces are not all the same. Individuals may leave in their early 20’s after a very short period of service or at the end of a 35-year career. They may have had to leave for health or disciplinary reasons, or have decided to leave to seek fresh challenges in a new career. Whatever their age or length of service, the transition needs for them and for their family will all be different.
- Veterans may face a lack of understanding from potential employers about the transferable skills they gained in the Services. They may face a lack of awareness from civilian medical professionals of the challenges some of them may have faced, and a lack of knowledge from some support providers of what they can, and should, do for veterans.
- Service leavers themselves may have unrealistic expectations of what life is really like in ‘civvy street’. Many prepare well for transition but there are still those who do not and who find life outside very different and more difficult than they imagined.

A lack of understanding is evident on a number of levels, creating barriers to positive transition. It is something I am keen to see addressed, and both central and local government need to do more in helping to make that happen. As well as a personal cost to individuals, there is an opportunity cost in failing to address this, in the cost to society in losing out on positive sources of talent.

Clearly, individuals and their families have the most to gain from a good transition, they hold the main stake and have the biggest part to play in it. It is their transition journey and they should own it. But others play a part and responsibilities should be shared.

Government has a stated morale obligation to help Service leavers transition to civilian life as seamlessly as possible; government designs and develops re-settlement policy which is delivered by statutory and voluntary sector partners, and much of that delivery takes place in the community, which has a role in supporting and welcoming Service leavers.

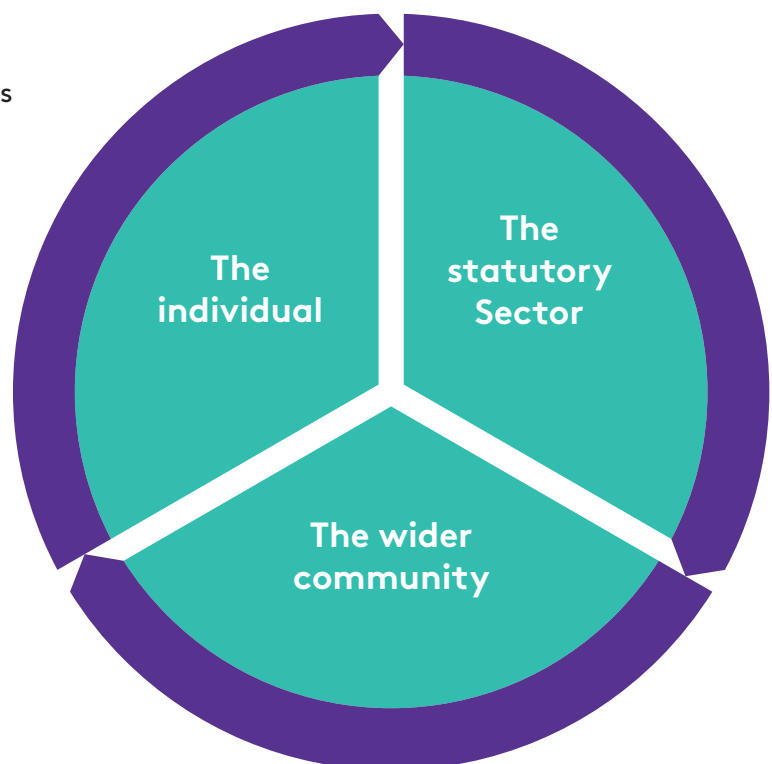
This leads me to conclude that transition should be a shared responsibility between:

- the individual, their needs and aspirations and those of their partner and family
- the statutory sector (including government and the MOD as the employer)
- the broader environment of the community (including Local Authorities, employers, community organisations, 3rd sector services and support bodies)

Transition introduced early enough, designed around the individual and owned by the individual, can help build the habits of independence necessary in the broader shifts we see emerging in Service life, including the FAM and the NEM mentioned previously. That shift in the balance of responsibilities we already see in train in the Armed Forces needs to be complemented by a re-thinking of the transition process, responsibilities and support in place.

Transition – a shared Responsibility

Examining transition from these shared perspectives is something I will come back to in subsequent papers on specific aspects of transition.





The Support Landscape

The needs of our veterans and those transitioning or preparing to transition are many and varied. The support landscape in place is paved with good intentions but it can be confusing and services can be inconsistent. Primarily, the MOD and the Armed Forces as employers have a role and responsibility to support the individual during service. Transition support is currently provided as part of a comprehensive resettlement process, in accordance with the Tri-Service Resettlement & Employment Support Manual (JSP 534).

Some differences exist across the three services in the support on offer and when and how it is provided, but all are guided by the policies set out in the JSP and its focus on the careers and employment aspects of resettlement. Service leavers are effectively 'allocated' resettlement time and access to training and support to assist their transition. Time and support is allocated on a graduated basis, largely determined by length of service. Because it is triggered by the resettlement process, it typically only starts towards the end of an individual's military career.

I would argue that for today's Service leavers, all types of support offered should be designed and determined by the needs of the individual. The 'transition offer' should be outcomes focussed and flexible. It should be dynamic, the seeds being sown early in an individual's career and re-visited throughout their time in the military.

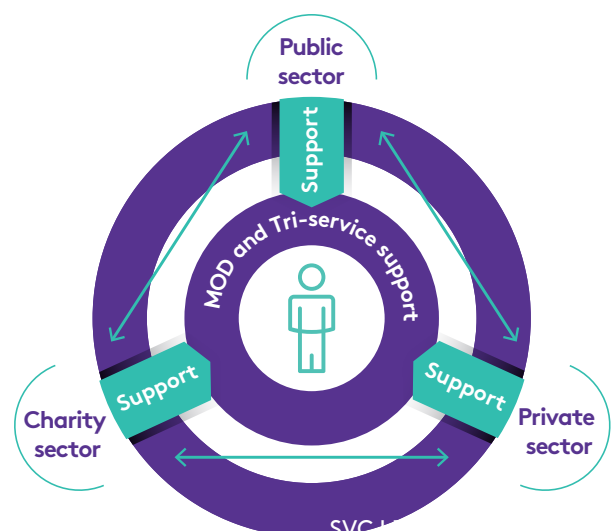
I am not suggesting the MOD move to a 'bespoke service', specifically tailored to each and every individual, but rather to a career long approach that enables individuals to 'own' their transition and draw on as much or as little advice and support as they personally need.

Beyond the support provided by the MOD and delivered by CTP and the Tri-services, there is a much wider network of organisations who play a vital part in supporting our Service leavers and ex-military communities. These range across a broad spectrum from statutory providers to the charity sector. Statutory providers include:

- Scottish and UK Governments (who design and implement policy, deliver services and support and fund specific initiatives)
- Local Authorities
- Health Boards and Health and Integrated Joint Boards

Within the charity sector, military and non-military charities large and small, provide advice, support and services aimed at ensuring Service leavers and veterans are properly recognised and helped in their re-integration back into civilian society.

Support built around the individual





The overview is one of a complex landscape; many would say cluttered, and it can certainly be confusing to the uninitiated and those it aims to serve. Many parts of it have developed and grown in an unplanned way over many years, fuelled by the best of intentions but resulting in layers of complexity. Despite this, its ideals and delivery usually embody high quality practice and a commitment to excellence that is second to none.

According to the 2018 report *The UK Armed Forces charity sector: A summary of provision*¹⁶ there are 300 registered charities in Scotland, (including 32 cross-border charities operating across the UK) who directly help the Armed Forces and veterans. after Armed Forces.

These range both in size and scope, and when coupled with statutory provision, I am sure there is probably an organisation out there for almost every issue an ex-service man or woman may face. The challenge is in working out who does what, and then connecting the individual to the right organisation.

There is also an assumption made that veterans are aware of the help and support that is available to them – and I do not think this is always the case. Beyond the challenge of basic awareness that help is out there, there can be further challenges to negotiate with duplication of services. It can often be difficult to work out exactly which organisation is best placed to provide the help an individual may need.

A support system with a holistic, person-centred approach should be flexible enough to be able to seamlessly signpost individuals from one area to another after identifying a particular need. More collaboration and better communication amongst charities and the statutory sector is essential in helping individuals navigate their way through this complicated environment.

16. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/759046/6.5046_MOD_Military_Charity_Report_v3_webNH.PDF

Conclusion and Next Steps

Having examined transition in broad outline, the conditions are now set for me to consider specific aspects in more detail. This paper is the introduction to a series which will focus on particular aspects of transition. I want to highlight the issues that still need to be addressed, with recommendations and pointers to Scottish Government and other stakeholders, aimed at ensuring we get transition right for all Service people and their families in Scotland.

In these subsequent papers I will look at these aspects of transition from three different viewpoints: the responsibilities of the individual service leaver, the statutory responsibilities of governments and others, and the responsibilities of communities.

The first paper will be focused on Employment, Skills and Learning, and some of the issues I want to consider will be: how best to promote the talents and skills that Service leavers bring to the civilian work place; the need for employers and businesses to be better informed about the value of employing veterans; improving employment opportunities for partners and spouses and exploring the opportunities for veterans within the further and higher education sectors.

Subsequent thematic papers will focus on:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Community and relationships
- Making a home in civilian society
- Finances and benefits

The Scottish Government has stated its aim to “make Scotland the most attractive destination for Service leavers and their families, offering high living standards, great job prospects and a society that respects and values their contribution”.¹⁷ This is an admirable goal, and one that it is already making inroads into. As the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, I have a role to play in assisting them in this, getting behind policies and actions that drive the necessary change; challenging the current thinking, including unhelpful stereotypes and myths about our veterans and what it means to serve, and promoting veterans and the skills, talents and the experience they bring.

A smooth transition to a rewarding and fulfilling civilian life is what we want to see for all Service personnel and their families, and getting it right is important not just for the individual, but for our labour market, the future of our Armed Forces, and to Scottish society at large.

17. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/renewing-commitments/>

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