

The Veterans Community

Employability, Skills
& Learning

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NOVEMBER 2016

Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Securing Employment	7
Chapter 2: Qualifications and Skills	17
Chapter 3: Further and Higher Education	23
Chapter 4: Looking to the Future and Leadership	30
Chapter 5: Case Studies	34
Chapter 6: Conclusions	44
Appendix: Recommendations and Findings	46

Foreword

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Foreword

Last year I met two students at Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) who had previously served in the Armed Forces. Both were inspiring characters but one, in particular, left a lasting impression as he described the challenges he faced during a short and troubled spell in the Army and a difficult transition into civilian life.

Derek – of whom you can read more about in case study 1 on page 35 – subsequently received vital support from the statutory sector, charities and the academic community that helped him to secure accommodation, meaningful work and a place at college. For the past two years he has studied Building Surveying at GCU, and it came as no surprise to hear that he recently graduated with an Honours degree. This happened just five years after leaving the military with minimal academic or vocational qualifications.

What makes this achievement so impressive is the fact that due to alcohol-related offences, Derek had spent time in the Military Correction Centre before being discharged, and back in Glasgow he was homeless and badly struggling to cope with life 'beyond the wire'. His success in overcoming these many challenges is testament to his drive and commitment, and to the help provided by several organisations and individuals. It also highlights the potential that is sometimes hidden amongst those who have served in the Armed Forces and have so much to offer Scotland's communities and workplaces, if given the right support and opportunities to succeed.

It is experiences like Derek's that have motivated me to write this report, which is aimed at helping more members of the veterans community in Scotland to secure meaningful and sustained jobs. I believe they can truly benefit from a system where the last remaining disadvantages and barriers have been removed, and opportunities in employment, skills development and academia are maximised.

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During the course of preparing this report, I have come to believe that we are on the path to achieving this in Scotland and, with the right leadership, attitudes and investment, we can do the very best by our veterans community. As its members come to be more fully recognised as valuable contributors to our society and economy, the benefits – for all of us – will be significant and worthwhile.

I am very grateful to the many individuals and organisations that so willingly contributed to the preparation of this report by providing information and advice that helped my understanding of complex and challenging issues. The ideas and encouragement offered were invaluable in shaping my views and in framing the conclusions and recommendations.

My sincere hope is that this report generates discussion and debate and, ultimately, provides direction for improving employment and learning opportunities for the veterans community in Scotland over the coming months and years. I look forward to playing my part in ensuring that ambition becomes a reality.

Eric Fraser CBE
Scottish Veterans Commissioner

Introduction

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Introduction

It is just over 18 months since I published my first report as Scottish Veterans Commissioner, *Transition in Scotland*. In that report I made much of the need to reverse a broader and destructive narrative that views veterans solely through the prism of need and obligation rather than recognising them for their strengths and attributes.

I was heartened by the response to that report – and a subsequent one I published on housing – and am buoyed by what I perceive to be an increasingly enlightened attitude towards the ex-military community. I do, though, consider that there is still some way to go and much more that needs to be done before veterans are fully utilised and appreciated for the valuable contribution that they can make to Scotland's communities and economy.

The area in which this can most powerfully and fruitfully be demonstrated is in employment. It, therefore, made obvious sense for my next report to look at the crucial issue of veterans' employability and to make recommendations that remove barriers to civilian employment, and promote the skills, experience and attributes of the veterans community more vigorously.

In looking at this wide-reaching and complex subject, it quickly became evident that issues relating to skills and learning are also inextricably linked. I have combined all three in this report and hope that it, thereby, provides a comprehensive and complementary set of recommendations and conclusions that will contribute to more and better job and learning opportunities for the veterans community across Scotland.

Structure of the report

The first three chapters cover the core subjects of 'Securing Employment', 'Qualifications and Skills' and 'Further and Higher Education'.

Chapter 4 covers two subjects that are fundamental to this agenda: how a changing military workforce in Scotland will impact on the next generation of veterans; and, the strategic leadership and governance that is essential to delivering meaningful change and sustained improvement in the future.

Chapter 5 combines a set of six case studies that highlight good practice and examples of the issues raised in this report. In my view, they bring real colour and life while providing pithy insights in a way that core text of a report can never achieve. I am particularly grateful to the contributors for providing such rich and relevant material.

Extracts from the case studies are included throughout the other chapters but I would still urge readers to take the time to look at the material in full.

Finally, Chapter 6 sets out my overall conclusions, which I hope provide a useful summary of what is a complex and wide-reaching agenda.

Securing Employment

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Securing Employment



There's a whole pool of untapped talent out there, and my advice to any employers considering recruiting from the ex-Service community would be to go for it."

John Kelly, HR Manager at Falcon Foodservice (case study 6)

It is widely recognised that one of the most important factors in achieving a positive transition from a military to civilian life is securing meaningful and sustained employment. Indeed, for the majority of the veterans community¹ finding a job that provides financial security and personal fulfilment is critical to enjoying success and happiness after a career in the Armed Forces.

The encouraging situation is that this diverse group is largely made up of intelligent, experienced, reliable and motivated people, who are ideally placed to take on many of the highly-skilled and rewarding jobs that are available across Scotland. Given their skills and experience, it might be reasonable to assume that most employers would be eager to recruit and take advantage of their talents. Unfortunately, that is not always the case and, apart from a growing number of major employers who are seeing the benefits of recruiting Service Leavers and veterans, I still encounter a degree of reluctance to hire from the ex-Service community. This is particularly evident amongst public sector organisations and the large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that make up so much of the business community in Scotland.

One of the consequences of this situation is highlighted in statistics recently published by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) which show that former military personnel are less likely to be in work (70% vs. 77%), and more likely to be unemployed (25% vs. 19%), than their counterparts amongst the general population in Scotland². These figures are a big improvement on those contained in a 2014 Poppyscotland report,³ nonetheless they still demonstrate the need for more to be done to help close the gap. These statistics also need to be considered alongside the significant degree of under-employment amongst some parts of the veterans community and the recurring difficulties many experience when applying for civilian work.

This chapter offers recommendations that are intended to help address some of these shortcomings. The first section focuses on the strategic level, with suggestions for developing the leadership, governance and funding required to underpin a long-term approach to employability for the veterans community.

Later in the chapter, I make a series of specific suggestions that are aimed at helping all veterans in their job quest, no matter their age or background. I believe that these – as with the other recommendations throughout the report – align with the Scottish Government's *Renewing Our Commitments* strategy and offer practical suggestions for bringing to life many of the pledges made in that document.

¹For the purpose of this report the 'veterans community' includes anyone who has previously served in the Armed Forces, their spouses and partners.

²MoD Annual population survey: UK armed forces veterans residing in Great Britain 2015.

³Health and welfare of the ex-Service community in Scotland 2014.

SECURING EMPLOYMENT – A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Leadership and Governance

During the debate in the Scottish Parliament that followed publication of my first report, *Transition in Scotland*, it became evident that there is strong political support for the veterans community amongst our elected representatives. Since then I have found this level of consensus and support to be reflected across Scotland, whether in discussions with local authorities, public services, the business sector or the general public. In each case, there is a strengthening desire to provide improved support for those in need and remove any disadvantage suffered as a result of time spent in the military.

The Scottish Government's subsequent policy document, *Renewing Our Commitments*, developed this theme further by expanding the idea of maximising the potential and contribution of the veterans community, especially in the workplace. It also reinforced a suggestion made in my earlier work that Scotland should be promoted as a 'destination of choice' for those leaving the Services and that we should start viewing veterans in a far more positive light than has historically been the case.

This is a very welcome shift in approach, particularly as it positions the veterans community as a distinct asset, with the attributes to help address national issues such as a skills gap and the population flight experienced in some areas.

Having set out this clear vision, the Scottish Government now needs to translate it into a far-reaching and practical plan that will deliver specific improvements for veterans and their families, as well as for the business community and wider economy. Many individuals and organisations wish to be part of this work but I see the Scottish Government as best placed to co-ordinate the effort and provide the strategic leadership required to deliver successful change. Its current engagement on employment issues with, amongst others, Business in the Community Scotland, SVETS, employers' organisations, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Scottish Enterprise, as well as many of Scotland's larger businesses, is particularly encouraging and offers a solid foundation on which to build.

Scottish Veterans Employment and Training Service (SVETS)

...is a collaborative initiative between employers, veterans organisations and others in Scotland that links former Service men and women with a wide range of small and medium-sized enterprises. It is designed to enable employers to access ex-military talent, address skills shortages, and develop training, graduate and apprenticeship programmes for veterans. It is delivered by a range of partners, including SaluteMyJob, Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce, Veterans Scotland, Jobcentre Plus, Skills Development Scotland and Business in the Community.

SVETS will be launching a new toolkit for employers in early 2017.

As a first step in providing the levels of leadership, governance and direction necessary to generate and maintain momentum, I believe the Scottish Government should establish a high-level group that is tasked to deliver the employability agenda set out in this report and in *Renewing Our Commitments*. The group should take a wide view of employment issues in Scotland so that it can integrate its work with existing national policies wherever possible. It should be prepared to exert the influence to produce widespread benefit to the veterans community, businesses and employers, and Scotland's economy. I would expect to see the group generate far greater collaboration and co-ordination across sectors, a strategic plan that looks well into the future and a robust means of measuring success.

Recommendation 1 – Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group

The Scottish Government should establish a Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group of key partners to provide strategic leadership and to oversee the activity required to fulfil the ambitions of more, and better, employment opportunities for veterans, as articulated in this report and in *Renewing Our Commitments*.

The working group should include core participation from the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Local Government representation, Ministry of Defence (MOD)/Career Transition Partnership (CTP), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and Veterans Scotland.

Scottish Veterans Fund

Another means by which the Scottish Government can demonstrate leadership and provide crucial financial support in this field is through the allocation of grants from the Scottish Veterans Fund. This fund was established in 2008 and has typically provided money annually to a diverse range of small projects that support veterans and their families.

The fund has recently benefited from a major injection of money from the private sector that will allow it to have a much larger and sustained impact. I am aware that there is debate at present about how this increased resource might be allocated. Given the importance of meaningful employment in underpinning a secure future after military service – and the significant focus on employability issues across Government and the sector – there is a compelling case to use these additional funds to deliver improved job and training opportunities for veterans, their spouses and partners. I recommend that this approach should be adopted in time for the 2017/18 allocation of funds.

Recommendation 2 – Scottish Veterans Fund

The Scottish Government should support proposals that promote employability and increase job opportunities amongst the veterans community as the priority when allocating resources from the Scottish Veterans Fund.

Veterans and the Skills Gap in Scotland

A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research concluded that *“the skills system in Scotland is not well matched to current labour market demand”*, estimating that the deficit between skills demand and supply was in the region of 29,000 individuals each year. The veterans community should be seen as part of the solution to this problem, especially given the number of skilled and experienced veterans already living in Scotland and the approximately 3,000 Service Leavers and family members who choose to settle here every year.

How this is achieved in practice will require further expert consideration and I, therefore, anticipate a newly formed Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group tackling this as one of its first challenges. Several initiatives already attempt to connect Service Leavers and potential employers but much more can be done to direct ex-Forces personnel and their spouses and partners into those areas where we know there is a specific shortfall, for example in education, health, IT and engineering. Statistics recently published by MoD also show veterans being under-represented in various key sectors, including construction, finance and insurance – all of which have a strong presence in Scotland, supportive employers and a marked skills shortage.

With an increased awareness within MoD and CTP of the skillsets of Service Leavers who settle in Scotland, and the statistical evidence of where the skills gaps exist, there is an opportunity to develop the sort of analytical, robust and ambitious plan that will ensure the veterans community is used more effectively to help address this issue. I would encourage early progress on this, taking a lead from some of the work done previously by the Scottish Government to re-train and re-employ skilled workers from the oil and gas sector.

Recommendation 3 – Filling the Skills Gap

The Scottish Government to review how the veterans community could be most effectively utilised to fill the known skills gaps in key sectors like education, health, IT, engineering, construction, finance and insurance. In doing so, it should consider whether its recent initiative to attract former oil and gas workers into teaching in the North East of Scotland should be replicated for the veterans community. This recommendation should be considered by the Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (see Recommendation 1) as one of its early priorities.

There is also a strong tradition amongst Service Leavers and members of the veterans community – particularly those who are older and more experienced – of setting up their own businesses. Many achieve significant success, especially in areas where their technical skills are in high demand. There are extensive opportunities for self-employment in Scotland and I am keen to see continued efforts by CTP, local Chambers of Commerce, Business Gateway and others to help more individuals towards this goal.

Employability Pilot

For several years the MoD has used its ‘Firm Base’ project to foster stronger links between its regional military leadership, local authorities, employers and local communities across Scotland. This has provided an effective vehicle for engagement on a diverse range of local issues and done much to build better understanding between parties that have sometimes struggled to work together. Recently I have become aware of an increasing determination, in geographical areas where there is already a large military presence, to adapt and extend this relationship with the specific aim of improving employment opportunities amongst Service Leavers, veterans, spouses and partners. Although very early days, this is a welcome and promising development that deserves further consideration at a strategic level.

I, therefore, propose the establishment of a pilot project that will build on this work by bringing together a group of key individuals and organisations that can foster significantly closer and mutually beneficial relationships between the military, local authority, community planning partnership, employers, academia and representatives of families and veterans in a local area. Its purpose should be to develop plans to create better and more job opportunities for Service Leavers, veterans, and spouses and partners.

The project will be an ambitious, complex and challenging undertaking which, if it is to be successful, will require participation from a large cross-section of organisations covering all sectors and many different subject areas. Many of the ideas currently under discussion are at an embryonic stage but the pilot project's potential is already becoming evident in Moray, North East Fife, Argyll & Bute and Glasgow (through their Glasgow Veterans Employment Programme).

Glasgow Veterans Employment Programme

... offers financial incentives to employers to recruit unemployed veterans in Glasgow. It guarantees 25-40 hours of work per week in a permanent post, paying the Glasgow Living Wage. To date, 150 veterans have been matched into further employment through the partnership of the City Council, Glasgow Helping Heroes, Remploy and the local Chamber of Commerce.

Again, I believe the Scottish Government is best placed to initiate and co-ordinate this project but the participants will each play a significant role and will need strong local roots as well as a proven ability to drive change within their particular organisations and communities. It will also be advantageous to have academic input to offer advice, monitor progress and determine the success (or otherwise) of the pilot.

Recommendation 4 – Employability Pilot Scheme

The Scottish Government should initiate and co-ordinate a regional employability pilot project, based in an area where there is a high military and veteran population. The purpose should be to deliver an increased number of meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for Service Leavers, veterans, and spouses and partners.

The pilot should involve the full range of organisations with an interest in the development of the local economy, the sustainability of its communities and the particular contribution that veterans and families can make to these ambitions. It should, therefore, see core participation from the Scottish Government, Local Government, Ministry of Defence, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Skills Development Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions/Job Centre Plus, Community Planning Partnership, employers, local college(s), and representatives of local veterans' families.

Statistics and Research

Organisations that provide support to the veterans community, both in the statutory and charity sectors, often struggle to identify long-term needs and to plan effectively for the future because of a lack of accurate data. Whilst most acute in health and housing, there is also an impact on decision-making in areas of employment and learning. The Royal British Legion and Poppyscotland recently led a national campaign calling for the next UK-wide census in 2021 to include questions about previous military service. I made a similar submission to the National Records of Scotland and my team is currently involved in discussions with them about the feasibility and scope of this proposal.

I am confident that fresh data on the veterans community from the census would contribute to improved strategic planning and evidence-based decision-making in Scotland. However, 2021 remains some years off and, in the meantime, there is a more urgent need for a better understanding of the current needs, profile and location of this cohort. There is a particular requirement for statistics on the employment situation and some serious analysis of the impact of the various national and local schemes to support the wider veterans community.

Recommendation 5 – Research and Evaluation

The Scottish Government should commission research to provide analysis of the current baseline of the employment situation for the veterans community and to evaluate the impact of national and local initiatives to improve job prospects.

SECURING EMPLOYMENT – SOME PRACTICAL MEASURES

On a surprising number of occasions, I have come across Service Leavers and veterans who have unrealistic or inaccurate expectations of what job opportunities are available to them after a career in the military. Some anticipate walking effortlessly into highly-paid senior posts in business purely on account of a strong track record of leadership and management in the Armed Forces. At the other end of the spectrum, others aim much too low and believe that the skills and experience reaped during their time in uniform will rarely apply in a civilian setting. Predictably, both tend to struggle to find their niche and often become frustrated and disheartened.

There are also a number of individuals who battle to find employment despite the best efforts of the Career Transition Partnership, the Officers Association Scotland (OA Scotland), the Regular Forces Employment Association (RFEA), and several other charities and organisations. In many cases this is attributed to poor application or CV writing skills and an ineffective performance at interview, particularly if using the ‘competency-based’ approach taken by many large organisations but not commonplace in the military. It is also apparent that a lack of civilian work experience – especially amongst recent Service Leavers – frequently counts against applicants when competing in a demanding jobs market, despite often impressive qualifications and experience.

The overall effect of these barriers to the best jobs is that a significant number of Service Leavers and veterans, and many spouses and partners, fail to fulfil their potential and end up frustrated and under-employed. Ultimately, this is wasteful – for the individual, potential employers and the broader economy – but it is also a specific disadvantage suffered by the veterans community at a time when they could otherwise achieve so much more.

Mentoring

One of the most effective means that I have come across for managing career expectations and preparing for civilian employment has been the mentoring provided by a number of employers in Scotland. For example, I have heard first-hand of the benefits of the advice and direct support offered by veterans networks in companies like Standard Life, Royal Bank of Scotland, Barclays and General Electric. Employees already in these businesses help veterans write applications and prepare for interviews, support successful applicants adjust to civilian employment and provide mentoring throughout their time there.

“ In recent years the Bank has recognised the unique skills and contribution that military personnel can bring to the organisation, it has listened and actively and publically increased its support for veterans and reservists. While there was little support when I joined, it’s a very different story today. The skills sets of the Armed Forces are more readily recognised within the Bank, and support for veterans, Reservists and their families is now fully integrated into the Bank’s Inclusion Department.

Jules McElhinney, RBS Audit Manager, veteran and Reservist (case study 5)

A further example, this time in the public sector, is provided by Police Scotland where its Veterans Champions Network is developing a support system for mentoring new and existing colleagues with military experience. This is an excellent example of an organisation recognising the benefits of recruiting from the ex-Service community and taking simple, practical measures to make it easier to apply, prepare for interview and succeed in a new career. The case study on page 36 describes this initiative in more detail.

“ Veterans have a strong work ethic, good leadership, discipline and problem solving skills learned in the military that are all easily transferable into the role of a police officer. However, the problem we see them face is how to formulate those skills, with many of them just not able to see their true potential.

Sgt Gordon Latto, Police Scotland Veterans Champion (case study 2)

Mentoring, in its various forms, is an effective and relatively low-cost means of helping Service Leavers and members of the veterans community into employment. I believe more organisations – both in the public and private sector – should consider establishing such a system, although I recognise that it takes time, effort and senior management buy-in to create an effective support mechanism. Employers cannot be forced down this path but those who have signed up to the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant will certainly wish to consider it as part of their commitment to the military community. Given that all local authorities in Scotland are signatories to the equivalent Community Covenant, they may also see the broader benefit, like Police Scotland, in providing this type of assistance.

Finding 1 - Mentoring

I would like to see more employers establishing networks of employees who can be a source of advice and mentoring support for Service Leavers and veterans, both those considering joining the organisation and those employed. I will continue to raise this suggestion with employers and encourage them to emulate the examples cited.

Work Placements

One of the recurring barriers for the veterans community when seeking meaningful employment is often a lack of experience of the civilian workplace. Too often this is used as part of the first sift during a recruiting process, which quickly excludes many whose skills could easily be adapted to jobs 'beyond the wire'.

In many instances this is compounded by a lack of understanding between civilian employers and those prospective employees who have spent most of their working lives in the military. It is well-known that every profession has its own acronyms, jargon and language but the Armed Forces are probably in a league of their own on that front. While some Service Leavers and veterans may be unsettled and confused by the language used in a civilian workplace, their new civilian colleagues may be equally nonplussed by the words, tone and attitudes on display. This can lead to suspicion, unease and, in the worst cases, a subsequent reluctance to accept former Service personnel into the workplace.

An example of this was provided by Simon, a Warrant Officer, whose work placement with a small company was beset by miscommunications and misperceptions. This was only addressed when the company CEO translated the soldier's language and skills into something familiar and non-threatening. Recognising that military 'intelligence collection' had many similarities with commercial 'market research' was a revelation to both parties and quickly provided common purpose and a much greater likelihood of Simon being offered a job. Further experiences of this individual during his various work placements can be found at the case study on page 37. It paints an interesting picture of how the veterans community can be perceived by those with little knowledge of the military or Service life.

Undoubtedly, seeing and hearing at first-hand how employers operate and their expectations of their workers is a vital way of preparing for civilian employment. The most effective way of achieving this is through work placements and I am aware that there are numerous opportunities for Service Leavers to participate in such schemes organised by CTP. There is, however, also a need for older veterans, as well as spouses and partners, to benefit from this type of experience, especially if they have been out of the job market for some time or are changing careers. Although opportunities already exist through statutory services, more are needed.

The number of large employers in Scotland that are signatories to the Armed Forces Corporate Covenant could reinforce their commitment to those who have served by increasing the number of work placements they offer to the veterans community. In addition, given the number of small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland, these businesses could also make a big contribution and I would be particularly pleased to see the work placement scheme run by Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce extended to other parts of Scotland.

Recommendation 6 – Work Placements

The Scottish Government should work with employers – both small and large – to find ways of offering more placements to Service Leavers, veterans, spouses and partners. This should be in addition to those offered by Career Transition Partnership.

Qualifications and Skills

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Qualifications and Skills

In the previous chapter, I made much of my conviction that finding suitable work is the critical step during any transition from a military career into civilian life. Service Leavers and members of the veterans community are little different from the rest of the population as they seek meaningful employment but there are several specific issues which add unnecessary complications and, in some cases, present significant barriers to those who've been part of the military 'family'. This chapter highlights a number of these difficulties, with a particular focus on qualifications and skills, and suggests measures which may help mitigate the most serious.

Background

Any pathway to suitable employment will depend initially on being able to demonstrate to employers: a minimum level of academic accomplishment, including adequate levels of literacy and numeracy; an appropriate set of technical and/or management skills; and, a broad range of personal qualities. This is not an easy or straightforward thing to do but there is no doubt that early success in securing meaningful work provides a sound basis for healthy, happy and financially secure lives.

Once in employment, even if just on the first rung of the ladder, there will be opportunities for greater responsibility and reward, but this will only be possible by first demonstrating core levels of literacy, numeracy and academic achievement.

Literacy and Numeracy

In preparing this report, I was surprised to discover the number of Service Leavers and veterans who still fail to find civilian employment because of their struggle to read, write and work with numbers. In most cases this can be attributed to some difficult years in school and often an overriding desire to escape the confines of their community and classroom at the earliest chance. For many, the Armed Forces – especially the Army infantry regiments with their lower academic entry requirements – have provided an attractive alternative with the obvious lure of travel, excitement, comradeship and a good salary. The disadvantages come later as individuals transition to civilian life and look for employment in a world that can often appear harsh and unforgiving.

Lord Ashcroft, in his 2014 report *The Veterans' Transition Review*, highlighted this issue extensively, citing Forces in Mind Trust's (FiMT) *Transition Mapping Study*, which included the statement that “close to half of Army recruits (as opposed to Navy or RAF recruits) are classified as having literacy and numeracy skills...equivalent to the expected reading and numerate age of an 11 year old as they leave primary school”.

This is a stark finding that will resonate in many parts of Scotland, particularly in those areas where there is a significant number of Army veterans. It indicates the scale of the issue and the level of disadvantage that many of those who have served could well be facing.

For those who want or need to improve levels of literacy and numeracy, and are still serving in uniform, the onus is with their education unit and military chain of command. Each of the main base areas in Scotland already offer classes and individual support to address educational shortfalls, with specific help being available for those with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It is important that this support continues.

Recently, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has also reinvigorated and broadened its apprenticeship schemes across the Armed Forces. Those now joining with low levels of literacy and numeracy attend compulsory classes, which aim to bring them up to a standard in preparation for promotion and later transition into civilian employment. Young soldiers, airmen and sailors will not advance to the next stage of training, and be allowed to join operational units, until they achieve these standards. Such measures are very welcome and will go a considerable way in addressing the issues highlighted by Lord Ashcroft, FiMT and others.

For those who are no longer serving in the military, help is available from a variety of different sources, including Local Authority community-based support services, colleges, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and a number of third sector organisations. The 'Big Plus' initiative is intended for anyone who wants to improve their reading, writing or ability to use numbers. It offers nationwide, community-based tuition at no cost but, regrettably, few Service Leavers and members of the veterans community consider enrolling or even appear aware of the support available.

The MoD in Scotland and the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP) could, therefore, make a marked difference by renewing efforts to promote the 'Big Plus' and other community-based schemes to Service Leavers during their resettlement and transition processes. Material could be more prominently displayed around barracks and on the CTP website, and every opportunity must be taken to direct individuals towards these resources whenever there is a need or request.

Similarly, SDS should recognise that a proportion of ex-Service personnel – especially Early Service Leavers or those who joined from school with minimal educational qualifications – may be struggling to find civilian work because of their low levels of literacy and numeracy. I would encourage them to find ways to target this group and make it easier for all members of the veterans community to access support. Close co-operation with CTP, better promotion and greater awareness of the issue amongst their careers advisors would all be positive steps forward.

Recommendation 7 – Improving Literacy and Numeracy

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP), Local Authority community-based support services, colleges, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and charities should promote the benefits of improved literacy and numeracy skills amongst Service Leavers and veterans, directing them to appropriate community-based support, including the 'Big Plus' initiative. The aim should be to generate greater awareness amongst veterans with specific needs, their families and employers in order that learning opportunities can be accessed more readily.

Military Training and Qualifications

The British military is renowned for the quality of its people and the training undertaken at every stage of their careers. From the day a recruit joins, he or she is exposed to a constant drumbeat of courses that will improve their professional competencies and personal qualities. This is an enormous investment which teaches technical, management and leadership skills that also have significant applicability in later life for those competing in the civilian job market. Those who have benefited from this training are well-placed to fill a growing demand for high-calibre, well-trained and motivated people, and to help address the skills gap in Scotland.

Of all the military training programmes, the one that is likely to have the greatest impact in the future is the new apprenticeship scheme that is mentioned above. Previously, only those embarking on technical careers in the Armed Forces had the opportunity to complete this type of training but the recent introduction of apprenticeships for all recruits is a major advance. They are built around the needs of basic military training but, for the first time, also lead to widely-recognised SVQ/NVQ qualifications.

The benefits of these apprenticeships have yet to come to the fore but I anticipate them soon having a lasting effect on the overall quality of our military, and the skills and formal qualifications of the next generation of Service Leavers and veterans.

It is also worth highlighting the higher-level skills that exist amongst some Service Leavers and veterans. These are typically demonstrated by those who have enjoyed long and successful careers in the military. Their qualifications have been gained as a result of extensive practical experience, typically combined with advanced technical and staff training, which can equate to a Masters degree level in other professions. Although relatively few in numbers, these individuals have the potential to make a substantial and lasting impact across different roles, for example, project management, engineering, IT, finance and education. All will have extensive management and leadership capabilities, and some will have worked at Board level for several years. Once again, more can be made of this cohort.

“ I think service leavers can undersell themselves terribly sometimes. Many come to us with a complete transferable skillset already, they just don't know it. We help them realise their full potential and ensure they emphasise the quality of their military training in interviews. Army training is second-to-none and I think this is something more employers should realise.

Norman Yarwood, FDM Group Scotland and veteran (case study 4)

Recognition of Qualifications and Skills

There is broad acceptance that employers, colleges, universities and others see formal qualifications, both academic and vocational, as an objective measure of the knowledge and skills an individual has to offer. These qualifications are also often taken as an indication of an ability to learn and take on new challenges – highly desirable qualities that give an indication of future performance and potential. It is, therefore, unfortunate that a significant proportion of these civilian organisations still have difficulty in recognising many of the qualifications obtained during a military career and little understanding of what this offers in the way of relevant skills and personal attributes.

This issue is one that has been raised frequently with me during discussions with employers, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In most cases, few have the expertise or time to spend on understanding every military qualification or attribute, and when recruiting will look no further than Service Leavers and veterans' academic records, easily recognisable technical skills and/or a degree. Given that SMEs comprise the bulk of businesses in Scotland, and therefore should offer a variety of employment possibilities for the veterans community, I believe there is a missed opportunity here.

During the past few years the MoD has, however, made inroads into addressing some of these problems. Training received through the Services is now routinely mapped across to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), while promotion and career courses are typically recognised by organisations such as the Institute of Leadership & Management, the Chartered Management Institute and City & Guilds. This is starting to have an effect but much of the work is being done in a piecemeal fashion – often through individual Services and branches – which can still lead to confusion amongst employers who are left struggling to recognise the relevance, and importance, of military qualifications presented by applicants.

Also, at an individual and local level, CTP and military charities, specifically the Regular Forces Employment Association (RFEA) and Officers Association Scotland (OA Scotland) provide vital help to Service Leavers and veterans in translating military qualifications into a more readily understood equivalent for a civilian employer. Like many veterans, I personally benefited from this support when I left the Royal Navy and recognise how valuable it can be.

Notwithstanding this encouraging level of support, and policy changes by MoD, I still come across considerable frustration amongst groups of veterans who believe skills and qualifications gained in the military are neither properly understood nor appreciated. I understand this sentiment but also have sympathy with employers who are unlikely to have had much exposure to the Armed Forces or to know about the benefits of recruiting Service personnel. Unfortunately, this problem is often compounded by veterans being unable to present or explain their achievements in the appropriate and convincing manner, either in applications or at interview. These issues all combine to complicate and hinder the pathway into meaningful employment for many Service Leavers and veterans.

It is, therefore, vital that more is done to ensure that qualifications and skills gained while serving are better understood and more widely recognised by employers in Scotland. This is a challenging undertaking which will require us to break new ground, specifically by including far wider representation from across the public and private sectors. As such, I believe there is a central role for the Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (see Recommendation 1) in co-ordinating efforts and developing a plan that delivers this aim.

Recommendation 8 – Recognition of Qualifications and Skills

The Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (see Recommendation 1) should produce a plan for building understanding and recognition amongst Scottish employers (especially SMEs) of the skills and qualifications gained in the military. The Group should also consider whether the current system for translating and mapping qualifications could be simplified and how it might be better utilised and understood.

‘Falling Between the Gaps’

Despite an overall picture of improving educational standards amongst those making the transition after a military career, and better in-Service learning and training, there remain a number of veterans who will never have benefited from these opportunities. These individuals will typically fall into one of two categories, either (1) the Early Service Leavers who depart the military without completing an apprenticeship or their basic training, or (2) the older Service Leavers and veterans who will have missed the apprenticeship scheme altogether and never taken advantage of the learning and training offered when they were serving.

Although some in the latter group may well have offset their educational limitations with skills picked up during years of work, both are still likely to find barriers to securing meaningful and sustained civilian employment in later life.

For these groups of veterans, the relationship between CTP and SDS will be critical if they are to benefit from seamless, ongoing employability support when they leave the Services. At present most new veterans will enjoy up to two years of support from the MoD before responsibility for careers advice passes to SDS. It is reassuring that there is already dialogue between the two organisations and a better understanding of their respective roles. I welcome this common-sense approach and would, in particular, encourage them to develop a practical means of providing seamless support to these groups who are otherwise in danger of ‘falling between the gaps’.

Recommendation 9 - Support for the Long-Term

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) should build on their existing relationship with the aim of ensuring Service Leavers and veterans have seamless access to SDS once their period of support from CTP comes to an end. This will be particularly important for Early Service Leavers and others in danger of 'falling between the gaps'.

However, there is also a third group of veterans who face challenges in the job market, consisting the minority of veterans who may be struggling to cope with civilian life for a range of health and social issues. This includes the homeless, those with drink or drug dependencies and those who suffer from mental health problems. Many find it extremely difficult to present a positive impression to potential employers and it is often only thanks to charities like SAMH and Poppyscotland, with their Employ-Able scheme, that they find work that suits their particular circumstances. For such a cohort, this sort of opportunity often provides a powerful antidote to some difficult and debilitating circumstances. Though relatively few in number, individuals in this group should not be overlooked and I am particularly keen that they are kept in mind as this broader agenda starts to deliver changes for the wider community.

Employ-Able

... is a programme that provides one-to-one and group support for veterans, helping them to improve their personal and employability skills, identify a vocational goal and find employment no matter their health or circumstances. It is a partnership between Poppyscotland and the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) that works closely with the public sector, RFEA, Veterans First Point and other charities to tailor training, identify volunteering opportunities, secure work placements for veterans struggling to 'move forward' after leaving the Armed Forces.

Further and Higher Education

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Further and Higher Education

The path from the military into further or higher education in Scotland – either directly or at some point after leaving the Services – is one that is rarely trodden. This is despite a number of incentives and the well-documented employment, social and health advantages that result from better academic, technical or professional qualifications. Very few Service Leavers see a spell at college or university as part of their transition process, and even fewer consider a return to education in later years. This is a missed opportunity – both for individuals, and for the country which is unlikely to benefit from their true potential over the long-term.

Background

I have had many conversations with veterans during the past year – both young and old – and have been struck by the number who recognise that their lack of formal qualifications has restricted employment opportunities and their subsequent earning power since leaving the Armed Forces. For some it has been a question of needing to improve basic literacy and numeracy skills. Others acknowledge the need for better academic or technical qualifications to widen their job options, strengthen CVs or enhance future promotion prospects. A small number also recognise the benefit of attaining additional degrees, whether to make them eligible for senior posts or to follow an academic career.

The vast majority of these veterans never seriously considered the idea of further or higher education – and had rarely been encouraged to do so by those advising them during the transition process. Understandably, the universal priority after a career in the Services is securing another job with a steady income and the means to support oneself and family. The option of attending an intensive, and often lengthy, course at college or university was never seen as a realistic one, the assumption being that it would likely be too expensive, too challenging and inaccessible. The comment made by Derek summed up an attitude that is still far from unusual across this community.

“ I’m a scheme boy plus I’m dyslexic, I didn’t think I was the type of person that could do it [attend university]. I’m so glad I believed in myself, and just need a chance in the workplace now to show just what I can do. ”

Derek Boyd, Early Service Leaver (case study 1)

The Barriers

It became evident during my research for this report that many of these perceived obstacles are far from unique to the veterans community. Challenges of funding and access, meeting entrance standards, recognition of prior learning and experience, and anxieties about competing with much younger students are common amongst members of the general population looking to attend college or university in later life.

Considerable efforts are being applied at a national level – including the work of the Commission on Widening Access – to counter these barriers and provide greater educational opportunities for all. Given that the veterans community is an important and sizeable component of Scottish society with significant potential, I have focused my attention on current mainstream initiatives that could be expanded or adapted to reinforce opportunities for this group.

This chapter recommends changes that are intended to make it easier for veterans to access and succeed in further and higher education. In doing so, I believe that not only will this improve their circumstances and prospects, it will also help address skills gaps in vital sectors and make an increased contribution to our economy.

FURTHER EDUCATION

There is no doubt that the structure of 26 colleges across 13 regions in Scotland should provide the most obvious and accessible means of learning for members of the veterans community seeking to enhance their academic, technical or professional qualifications. Based in the local community with strong links to businesses and other employers, colleges have a strong track-record of delivering skilled individuals for work. Crucially, one of their defining principles is that of “fair access, regardless of background and circumstances”.

It is, therefore, disappointing that a relatively small number from the ex-Service community take advantage of the learning and training on offer. In most cases this is due to an economic decision based on the loss of earning potential while studying, although issues such as status, confidence and awareness also feature.

As a first step, I encourage Colleges Scotland and their members to consider ways of better engaging the veterans community in order to persuade more to consider a college education. This is needed to promote the learning and training opportunities available as well as the consequent employment benefits. The colleges themselves also stand to gain from having a mature, committed and reliable addition to their student population.

As part of this work, it will be important for Colleges Scotland to develop closer links with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and employment charities. These organisations already provide advice and support to Service Leavers and veterans across a range of employment, education and training issues, and are, therefore, well placed to assist Colleges Scotland.

Recommendation 10 – Veterans Attending College
Colleges Scotland to work with their members to engage the veterans sector more closely in order to promote the benefits of, and opportunities to participate in, college education. Ultimately the outcome should be an increase in numbers from the veterans community taking up college places.

Modern Apprenticeships

In my previous report *Transition in Scotland*, I highlighted the benefits of Modern Apprenticeships, in particular for Early Services Leavers, and recommended that the Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) should promote them more actively. I believe the programme remains highly relevant for the veterans community, especially as apprenticeships provide such an important means to generate income while studying towards an accredited qualification and improving job prospects.

Undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship will, of course, not be appropriate for all Service Leavers and veterans. However, for a significant number of those younger men and women who do not complete an apprenticeship in the military, and the slightly older veterans who need to up-skill or retrain, the programme offers many advantages.

In response to the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce (the ‘Wood Report’), the Scottish Government has invested significant funding in expanding apprenticeship programmes over the past few years. In that time, I have become even more persuaded of the need for this type of training and support for veterans and re-

iterate the recommendation made in my previous report. Given the important role of military spouses and partners, which I mention throughout this report, it follows that they should also be targeted as part of the efforts to promote Modern Apprenticeships.

Recommendation 11 – Modern Apprenticeships

The Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and Colleges Scotland should develop a plan to promote the Modern Apprenticeship programme to Early Service Leavers, veterans who would benefit from up-skilling or retraining, and spouses and partners.

Sponsorship

As I mention in the introduction to this chapter, the major challenge facing veterans looking to attend college is the drop in income and consequential financial stresses on family life. One way to circumvent this problem is provided by employers that sponsor individuals to undertake part-time college studies in conjunction with their day-to-day employment. This undoubtedly demands substantial commitment and trust from both parties but my experience of meeting a number of participants suggests that Ex-Service personnel are particularly well-suited to, and benefit from, this sort of arrangement. I would like to see veterans offered more of these opportunities and look to the Scottish Government and employers to identify ways of achieving this objective.

Recommendation 12 – Sponsorship at College

The Scottish Government should work with employers to identify ways of supporting, and perhaps incentivising, sponsorship schemes that will allow a greater number of Service Leavers and veterans to undertake college studies in conjunction with full time employment.

Flexible learning options

Flexible learning options are an increasing feature of education in Scotland today and offer a major opportunity for those in the veterans community who want to study, and also have to juggle work and family commitments. Studying part-time, or via distance learning, has yet to be fully exploited by Service Leavers and veterans, especially by those who settle in more rural and remote areas. This is a topic which merits further discussion and I will engage with Colleges Scotland as part of the follow-up to this report in order to determine how we can help the veterans community take advantage of these possibilities.

Finding 2 – Flexible Learning

Flexible learning options offer a significant, yet under-utilised, opportunity for members of the veterans community. It is a subject that deserves further consideration and I look forward to engaging with Colleges Scotland, and others, over the coming months.

Higher Education

The Scottish Government established the Commission on Widening Access last year to consider how more students from disadvantaged backgrounds can succeed at university. In the course of their work, I met the Chair of the Commission, Dame Ruth Silver, to offer the veterans' perspective. We agreed that while the number affected by the issues raised in her study was relatively small, the challenges facing veterans keen to undertake university studies were often very similar to those of the wider population.

The Commission subsequently published its report, *A Blueprint for Fairness*, in March 2016, in which it made a number of recommendations. Those that resonated most strongly with me, given their relevance for veterans, concerned entry standards and the option of alternative paths into higher education.

Entry standards

The Commission's report stated that in many cases entry requirements to universities in Scotland have risen well beyond what is required to succeed in degree level study. It went on to recommend that by 2019 all universities should set access thresholds for degree programmes against which learners from the most deprived backgrounds should be assessed. The Commission was clearly seeking to ensure that talented young people who, for a variety of reasons, did not necessarily shine academically at school are given the opportunity to realise their full potential.

This issue is particularly pertinent for veterans who originally signed up to the Services with minimal or no formal academic qualifications. Time spent in the military can, though, be transformative in tapping into and developing inherent skills and talents. It can also awaken a fresh interest in learning, even for those whose school experience was less than positive.

I believe the Commission's ambition of widening universities' admissions policies is equally applicable to veterans who have the potential to succeed in Higher Education. All universities would benefit from attracting these individuals and, therefore, should consider adapting access thresholds to increase their opportunities. It will also be important to advertise and promote these changes amongst those who are currently serving, the veterans community and organisations that provide advice and support.

Recommendation 13 – Access Thresholds

In fulfilling the recommendations from the Commission on Widening Access, all universities should consider how access thresholds can be specifically applied to the veterans community. Subsequently, they should advertise and promote these thresholds widely across the military and veterans sectors.

From college to university – recognition of prior learning and articulation

The Commission on Widening Access also identified the expansion of 'articulation pathways' – progression from college to university where full credit is awarded for prior learning – as a powerful means of advancing fairer access to higher education. It went on to recommend that the Scottish Funding Council should seek more demanding targets from those universities that have not traditionally been significant players in this field.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, I recently had the privilege of meeting a couple of veterans for whom the accelerated progression from college to university had been central to them fulfilling their potential. As seen amongst the wider population, a key feature of this journey was being able to use prior learning – gained in the military and at college – to start a university degree course at a later stage.

Clearly, being able to by-pass the early years of a degree course in this way reduces the significant living costs of attending university and permits earlier entry back into the jobs market. This has enormous implications for veterans who may be faced with major financial and family commitments. I look forward to the veterans community benefiting from the changes envisaged by the Commission.

Recommendation 14 – Articulation

The Scottish Funding Council, universities and colleges to specifically consider the veterans community as they embark on the expansion of articulation, as recommended by the Commission on Widening Access.

Graduate Apprenticeships

Another means by which a small number of the veterans community could access higher education is via the newly established Graduate Level Apprenticeships programme. Like its Modern Apprenticeships equivalent, it is designed to allow participants to work and earn a wage while studying for qualifications, this time at university and up to Masters degree level.

The programme is in its infancy and has an initial focus on ICT/Digital, Civil Engineering and Engineering, subjects that will be well suited to some veterans. I shall be keen to observe how it develops over the coming months and years, and shall retain an active interest in how it is promoted amongst the veterans community.

Next Phase

With an increase in demand for recruits with higher academic and technical qualifications, it is inevitable that many more of the next generation of veterans will be suited to university after they leave the military. As highlighted in the previous chapter, these individuals will also have benefited from extensive training and education opportunities while serving and are likely to see the greater employment opportunities that often result from a university education.

It was heartening, therefore, that the Commission recognised those leaving the Armed Forces as a group worthy of further consideration under the Widening Access agenda. I hope that my recommendations make a worthwhile contribution and help ensure that veterans feature in the next phase of this work.

Funding

Without doubt, it is worth re-iterating the point that issues of finance – especially living costs and the loss of earnings while studying – are by far the biggest concern for members of the veterans community considering further or higher education. I have already offered suggestions under sections on Sponsorship, Flexible Learning and Widening Access that may go some way to mitigating some of these worries, but there is no doubt that any decision to attend college or university will require considerable financial sacrifice and commitment.

In most cases tuition fees for individuals attending colleges and universities in Scotland are paid by the Government. There are also various bursaries and grants available to students, ranging from help with living costs to travel and childcare. Veterans may be able to take advantage of these, as well as the 'Enhanced Learning Credits'¹ available through the MoD.

¹Under the Enhanced Learning Credit (ELC) scheme Service Leavers can receive financial help (up to a maximum of £3000) with the cost of learning when taking on courses that result in a nationally recognised qualification at level six or above on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

That said, the most immediate problem for the veterans community is the current lack of reliable, comprehensive and accessible information about the specific financial support available. Only with a full understanding of the support available can they make an informed decision that is almost certain to have life-changing consequences for themselves and their families. I, therefore, welcome the Scottish Funding Council's offer of co-ordinating the production of bespoke material for veterans.

Recommendation 15 – Information about Colleges and Universities

The Scottish Funding Council should work with relevant organisations - including Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and Student Awards Agency Scotland - to produce material designed specifically for the veterans community. This should include information about finance and the support available for those enrolling at college or university. Subsequently, this material should be made available widely amongst the serving and veterans communities, and those like CTP and SDS who support them.

Champions/Support Network

As I also covered in some detail in the first chapter, I am increasingly persuaded of the value of having a single point of contact, champion or active network of veterans in a range of organisations. This is equally applicable to the further and higher education sectors where I have already come across members of staff who offer vital mentoring and advice to Service Leavers and veterans. This was particularly evident at Glasgow Caledonian University and Perth College where formal and informal networks provide valuable support to the ex-Service communities. Given the benefits enjoyed by individuals, and the colleges and universities themselves, I would like to see these networks replicated more widely. I look forward to working with Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland and Veterans Scotland to achieve this.

Recommendation 16 – Veterans Network/Champions in Colleges and Universities

Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland should work with their members and Veterans Scotland to establish a network of champions across all colleges and universities. The champions can provide the first point of contact for members of the ex-Service community applying for, or undertaking, further and higher education. They should also consider offering mentoring, advice on applications and funding, and be part of the wider champions network in Scotland.

Looking to the Future and Leadership

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Looking to the Future and Leadership

In the course of researching and writing this report, I was heartened to learn about the extent of the support and advice that is available to Service Leavers and veterans seeking new or better employment, learning and training opportunities. It was also evident that there is a strong appetite among a wide range of stakeholders to see veterans given more chances to utilise fully their skills and experience in meaningful and sustained post-military jobs – something that will be of benefit to the individual veteran and their family, and also importantly to Scotland's communities and economy.

It also struck me, though, that now is an opportune time not only to highlight and acknowledge the support and good practice that already exists but to seek to build on it with improvements in policy, practice and leadership at all levels.

In approaching the task of producing recommendations for how such improvements can be achieved, two significant issues kept arising that should be foremost in minds as we move forward on this wide-ranging and important agenda. These are:

- the changing nature of the military workforce and their families in Scotland and the impact this will have; and
- the level of leadership and governance that will be required to drive and deliver the changes envisaged in this report.

THE FUTURE

A changing workforce

Scotland is home to a number of iconic and significant military bases – most prominently, in Moray, the Clyde, Edinburgh and Fife – with a high proportion of technically savvy and talented personnel. The number of employees at some of these bases will also increase over the next decade with the arrival of Typhoon and Poseidon (P8) squadrons in Lossiemouth and the Royal Navy's entire submarine service in Faslane. It is, however, worth bearing in mind that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is currently preparing to set out reforms to the laydown of other bases through to 2040 and reviewing its current employment model across the UK. Both will have an impact in Scotland.

Regardless of future basing plans, I am aware that the nature of the military workforce in Scotland is already changing. As I have highlighted throughout the report, Service personnel in the future are increasingly likely to be better educated, trained and qualified than their predecessors. There will also be a significant number of Reservists – from all three Services – who will spend as much of their time in civilian employment as in uniform. Each will have the potential to make lasting contributions in communities and workforces across Scotland.

This situation presents a clear opportunity for employers to enhance their workforce by recruiting ex-Service personnel with highly desirable technical, leadership and management experience. In the areas of Scotland where there is a demographic challenge and/or skills gaps in the economy, the potential exists to go some way to solving these issues – but only if this next generation of veterans is persuaded to settle locally upon leaving the Armed Forces.

Spouses and partners

Another aspect of the changing nature of military life in Scotland today is the clear employment potential of spouses and partners of serving personnel. I have become increasingly aware of the significant role they often play in anchoring their family in communities and the influence they have when deciding where to settle after several years of 'following the flag'. That decision will depend heavily on them having good career prospects locally, access to reliable public services and a continuing high quality of family life.

For many in the military, the future employment prospects of the serving family member is, therefore, not the sole consideration. It is apparent that spouses and partners must be considered as a key part of the employability, skills and learning policy agendas over the coming months and years.

This was reinforced by the results from a recent survey undertaken by Recruit for Spouses, a social enterprise focused on helping military spouses into jobs. It revealed impressive levels of qualifications and skills, yet high levels of under-employment, amongst spouses based in Helensburgh, the closest town to the naval base on the Clyde.

Of the respondents to the survey, almost 70% had a degree, professional or SVQ/NVQ level qualification and of the 42% who were not working 82% expressed a desire to do so. Although taken from a relatively small sample size, these statistics nonetheless reinforce my experience of a pool of well qualified, skilled and motivated people that could be utilised far more productively than is currently the case. I have featured spouses and partners throughout this report and consider them as central to many of the recommendations.

In summary

I am strongly of the view that the changing nature of the military workforce in Scotland and the oft under-utilised potential of military spouses and partners present a unique opportunity. My hope is that this report offers the direction and specific recommendations for changes that will, in time, see the veterans community regarded as a highly sought after and valuable asset within our communities and work places.

LEADERSHIP

I am clear, though, that significant and enduring change and improvements in the areas featured in this report will not be possible without the continued interest and leadership from the Scottish Government and politicians of all hues.

The Scottish Government's *Renewing Our Commitments* document is an ambitious strategy that articulates an enlightened vision of the potential contribution and value of the veterans community to Scotland. It will be important for the Government to maintain momentum on this agenda and to continue to be ambitious if the changes envisaged in its strategy and in this report are to be realised.

The Scottish Parliament, particularly the Cross-Party Working Group on the Armed Forces and Veterans Community, also has a key role to play in providing the political impetus for change and scrutinising the Government's progress in delivering it. I believe that this report provides another hook for raising the profile of veterans issues amongst our elected representatives and I look forward to their continued interest and engagement.

Recommendation 17 – Parliamentary Scrutiny of Veterans Issues

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work should in due course report the progress made against implementing the recommendations in this report (and my two previous reports) to the Scottish Parliament. The aim should be to raise the profile of veterans issues amongst Parliamentarians and provide them with the information necessary to scrutinise the Scottish Government's work in this field.

Jobs in the public sector

Employers, many in the veterans sector and commentators will, rightly, look to the Scottish Government to lead by example when it comes to making changes. One means by which it can demonstrate this leadership, and set a prominent example to others, is by being more proactive in its own approach to recruiting and supporting the veterans community in securing jobs within the Scottish Government and associated agencies. It is, though, only fair to acknowledge that due to the No Compulsory Redundancy policy in place for employees, there are strict constraints on external recruitment and, therefore, a limit on how veterans might immediately benefit from changes.

Notwithstanding the current restraints, the public sector remains a large and important employer across Scotland. The Government still has the potential to demonstrate its commitment to making this report's ambitions a reality by targeting and supporting the veterans community in securing the jobs that are advertised externally and for incorporating veterans into their future workforce planning.

Recommendation 18 - Jobs within the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government to assess its current and future recruitment policies with a view to identifying opportunities to better target and support the veterans community in securing Scottish Government jobs. In doing so, it should consider Police Scotland's approach of providing tailored information, personal support in completing applications, and advice in preparing for interviews. Mentoring from ex-Service personnel within the civil service is likely to play a crucial role.

Another significant public sector employer is, of course, NHS Scotland. I attended the last Armed Forces and Veterans Joint Group meeting, chaired by the Scottish Government and attended by Health Boards, and was hugely encouraged by the evident enthusiasm for utilising the talent of the veterans community within the NHS and providing better support to those interested in applying for jobs. I would like to see that enthusiasm harnessed and progress made against developing bespoke support and advice to the veterans community over the coming months.

Recommendation 19 – Jobs within NHS Scotland

NHS Scotland and individual Health Boards should develop and deliver commitments made at the last Armed Forces and Veterans Joint Group meeting to utilise the talents of the veterans community and provide better support and advice to those applying for jobs within the NHS.

Case Studies

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Case Studies

Case Study 1

EDUCATION AND EARLY SERVICE LEAVERS

For some ex-Service personnel, the transition from a life in the military into meaningful and sustainable civilian employment is made all the more difficult because of a lack of even a basic level of educational achievement.

It has been reported that almost half of Army recruits have, in the past, left school with levels of literacy and numeracy equivalent of an 11 year-old and it was likely that they, more than anyone else, would become the Early Service Leavers of the future.

The new Army Apprenticeship Programme should mean that those who have participated in the programme will have a higher level of educational achievement and be better equipped to find a job upon leaving the military, nonetheless there are some people who will already have fallen through the gaps.

Derek Boyd, Early Service Leaver, Glasgow

Twenty-six year old Derek Boyd from Glasgow is one young man who experienced this hurdle after leaving the Army. Derek left school aged 16 following a troubled few years, enlisting with the Royal Engineers in order to “keep himself out of jail”. He spent four years in England, Germany and Iraq working as an Army carpenter.

Aged just 17 and posted to Germany, Derek, by his own admission, didn't cope well with the military lifestyle; being so far away from home coupled with his troubled past, and exposed to a way of life so far removed from the familiarity of the east end of Glasgow. He turned to alcohol, and following a spate of alcohol fuelled incidents, he was discharged four years later, aged 20. Derek returned to his home in Glasgow and following a couple of years of severe unrest and little prospect of permanent employment, he decided to apply to college; the carpentry qualification he obtained in the Royal Engineers giving him the entry qualification he needed.

“Those first two years after leaving the Army were torture”, explains Derek. “I came back home and found it so hard to re-settle, find work and keep out of trouble, even narrowly avoiding jail for disorder. I eventually found work with City Building using my carpentry skills, and noticed my boss at the time was qualified to HNC level. I thought if he can do it, I can do it....and from there I managed to get into City of Glasgow College to do a one-year HNC. I was surprised by how easy I found it all – so I just kept going.”

Derek certainly did keep going, and has recently completed an honours degree at Glasgow Caledonian University in Building Surveying. He is now focused on finding sustainable employment, and like many Service Leavers has shown outstanding commitment and character to get to where he is today, even after a somewhat troubled military career.

Derek concluded: “I'm a scheme boy plus I'm dyslexic, I didn't think I was the type of person that could do it. I'm so glad I believed in myself, and just need a chance in the workplace now to show just what I can do.”

Case Study 2

MAKING SKILLS CONNECTIONS

One of the most important factors in achieving a successful transition from military to civilian life is securing meaningful and sustainable employment. Sometimes those seeking post-military employment can have unrealistically high – or low – expectations about what might be available to them upon leaving; equally there are employers that still do not understand, or fully appreciate, the qualifications, skills and attributes that Service Leavers can bring to a job.

Encouragingly, though, there are employers in Scotland that do recognise the strengths and attributes inherent in the veterans community and regard Service Leavers and veterans as potentially valuable assets to their organisation.

Police Scotland

Police Scotland is one such organisation that has embraced this mind-set and is actively recruiting from, and supporting, the veterans community. The Force has a recruitment team that participates in military and veteran recruitment events throughout Scotland every year.

A team of Veterans Champions from across the Forces' divisions support this activity, helping Service Leavers to recognise their potential and the transferable skills that they could bring to the organisation, and indeed to our communities as a Police Officer.

Sergeant Gordon Latto, Early Service Leaver & Veterans Champion

Sgt Latto has been with Police Scotland for 25 years, following five years with The Royal Tank Regiment. As a former Early Service Leaver, Sgt Latto is a key member of the Forces' Veterans Champions network. Alongside colleague Constable Wheatley, they are the driving force in developing a support system to mentor new and existing colleagues with a military background.

“The police force is an excellent career for a veteran to move into upon leaving Service”, says Sgt Latto. “Veterans have a strong work ethic, good leadership, discipline and problem solving skills learned in the military that are all easily transferable into the role of a police officer. However, the problem we see them face is how to formulate those skills, with many of them just not able to see their true potential.

“The Veterans Champions can make a big difference in helping Service Leavers overcome these barriers. Developing a relationship with them from the outset – at the recruitment events, throughout the application process and as a probationer – sharing their own experience as a veteran and police officer helps them to realise the transferable skills they can bring to the table.

“Those early stages can be a crucial time when they are first making that transition. If we can help mentor them through the process with support and guidance, they can have a very fulfilling career with Police Scotland.”

Case Study 3

EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONING SUPPORT

Simon Talbot, Regimental Sergeant Major of the Defence School of Policing and Guarding, was due to leave the Army at the end of the year after 25 years' service. However, after spending a month on various work placements, organised by Forth Valley Chamber of Commerce, the opportunity arose to extend his service for a further three years.

Translating Army to civilian life

"I've found it hard to identify what I want to do next and some employers struggle to understand how '25 years running around with a machine gun' relates to the working world. The reality was I looked after 187 permanent members of staff and was the interface to making my Commanding Officer's intentions physically happen. That spanned project and facilities management, HR, operational welfare, security, training, logistics and career management.

"For me the Army was the best job in the world. For developing young people, exposing them to character defining life experience and giving them the responsibility to see something through from start to finish you really can't beat it."

When the opportunity arose to return to the Army, it was not a given that Simon would take it. Had a civilian job, fitting to the wealth of experience that Simon could offer, become available he may have made the move. However, a guaranteed job for a further three years in the Army was too good to pass up and will give Simon further time to reflect on his future career options.

Effective transitioning support

Simon put his transition period to good effect, going on courses such as Lean Six Sigma (manufacturing) and NEBOSH (health and safety) as well as undertaking work placements. His support was 'top drawer' and he'd give the following advice to service leavers:

1. Go around with your eyes open to the opportunities that there are in the outside world
2. Utilise all CPD opportunities
3. Civilian work attachments form part of your transition and benefits not only yourself but civilians. Soldiers understand how hard people in real life have to work; civilians become less suspicious of those that have served.

Case Study 4

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT CAREER PATH

When it comes to taking their next steps in the working world, many Service Leavers find themselves at a loss. Some are unable to identify the value of their military skills in the civilian world, while for others it can be a challenge to find a route into a new industry.

Finding herself in the latter position was 33-year-old Fiona Chalmers, who left the Army in 2014 after eight years' service as a Captain in the Royal Artillery. "I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do next," says Fiona. "It's the same for a lot of folk when they leave. The army is a vocation and although I wanted to find something similarly fulfilling, I had no idea where my passion would lie. After working in the Middle East for a couple of years I returned to the UK in pursuit of a project management role in a global commercial company. Having worked in a high-pressure, fast-paced role on large-scale operations during my service career, I knew that I possessed the skillset for this; I just had to find a way in."

FDM Group

For Fiona, the solution was global professional services provider FDM Group, an IT-focused consultancy offering a dedicated careers programme for ex-Service personnel. To help broaden access, ex-Forces candidates are exempt from the degree requirements that are normally required to work for the company. Once accepted, employees undergo rigorous training, after which they are placed on a client site as an FDM Consultant for a minimum of two years. UK clients include major corporations across a range of sectors such as finance, media and retail.

Fiona applied for the programme following a recommendation from a fellow service leaver. "The FDM team helped translate our military skills into skillsets for the commercial world, and they covered every detail when it came to prepping for interviews, from maximising our experience to even perfecting our handshake."

Maximising potential

Two weeks into her six-week training programme, Fiona was offered a two-year placement as a project manager at HSBC Securities Services. Norman Yarwood, Business Operations Manager for Ex-Forces at FDM Group's Scotland office, says Fiona's trajectory is representative of the ready-made potential service leavers bring to the company.

"I think service leavers can undersell themselves terribly sometimes. Many come to us with a complete transferable skillset already, they just don't know it. We help them realise their full potential and ensure they emphasise the quality of their military training in interviews. Army training is second-to-none and I think this is something more employers should realise."

Giving veterans a head start

“Our ex-Forces employees enter the programme alongside those from a civilian background to encourage integration from the start but with additional support in areas such as relocation and expenses, where required. We find a lot of peer-to-peer support is fostered naturally among ex-Forces recruits.”

“Our ultimate aim is to give Service Leavers a head start in a new industry. Although employees can remain with us beyond two years, most see this as an opportunity to move on with two years’ solid experience at a reputable organisation under their belt.”

Fiona affirms that the ex-Forces programme has helped put her on track:

“My position at HSBC is a first-class opportunity which would have been very difficult to access myself. Although I’m capable of the job, it’s unlikely my CV would ever have made it in front of the right people if it hadn’t gone through FDM Group. It would be highly beneficial to both Service Leavers and employers if more direct routes into the corporate world were available.”

Case Study 5

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

It's much easier to advocate change from within an employer organisation so that skills and competencies gained in the Armed Forces are recognised.

Jules McElhinney, Service Leaver and RBS

Jules McElhinney, a former Captain with the 1st Battalion Black Watch, serving Reservist and Internal Audit Manager, has worked for RBS for eight years. He is a keen advocate of the Armed Forces Community within the Bank and has been instrumental in affecting positive change.

Today the RBS employs more than 60 veterans and recently won a Gold Employer Recognition Scheme from the MoD for its support of veterans and reservists. The RBS Armed Forces Network, led by Jules, has co-responsibility for ensuring the Bank delivers on its Armed Forces Covenant Commitment. Current initiatives which have Board level support include running veteran career development days, and working with the 51st Infantry Brigade and the MoD on translating the tangible transferable skill sets against RBS competencies.

One of the proudest moments in Jules' life was joining The Black Watch, combining his love of adventure, sport and the outdoor life, while 'doing his bit' for his country.

"For that sense of belonging there is no organisation that comes close to the Army. Your leadership and management skills are developed from day one, managing everything from welfare to the military skill set of 35 individuals at the age of 24 is not an experience you'd get in the outside world; at RBS the most direct reports you'd have is around 10."

Jules found the transition to 'civvy' life difficult. "Although you are not aware of them at the time; the values instilled in the Army are very strong and different to those outside. Loyalty, respect for others and team work is to the fore; you put others' needs in front of your own. In the outside world it is more about the individual. If you let someone down in the Army the consequences are that a life could be lost; planning and implementation is meticulous. Achievement of work milestones do not have the same consequences so more easily slip."

Translating competencies

Jules also felt that "people didn't really 'get me'". That hit home when asked in an interview how he would demonstrate his experience of handling two opposing forces. An incident in Iraq where two groups of soldiers were pinned down by machine guns required some quick thinking. For Jules it was a strong competency example, for the interviewer it didn't quite hit the mark.

Combining work and service

For the last 10 years Jules has combined his RBS work with serving as a Reservist and he is now the Commanding Officer of 6 SCOTS, one of two Reserve Infantry Battalions of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. He values the support he gets from the Bank and believes they in turn benefit from the leadership and management courses gained through his Reservist career

"In recent years the Bank has recognised the unique skills and contribution that military personnel can bring to the organisation, it has listened and actively and publically increased its support for veterans and reservists. While there was little support when I joined, it's a very different story today. The skills sets of the Armed Forces are more readily recognised within the Bank, and support for veterans, Reservists and their families is now fully integrated into the Bank's Inclusion Department."

Case Study 6

FALCON FOODSERVICE FIND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

For Stirling-based Falcon Foodservice, the UK's leading manufacturer of commercial cooking equipment, hiring veterans and investing in their development has proven to be a valuable step in enriching the company's workforce and driving product innovation.

The company's first experience of working with members of the ex-Service community came in 2014, when the hunt for a new product development manager brought candidate Douglas MacLachlan to the fore. Already out of the army for a few years, Douglas had built on his Service skills within the defence industry, and the recruitment team at Falcon identified his skillset as being the perfect fit for the role.

John Kelly, HR Manager at Falcon Foodservice, said:

"Aside from possessing the very specific skills required, Douglas immediately demonstrated a no-nonsense, can-do attitude. Combined with an unrivalled work ethic and an affinity for problem solving, his ex-Service qualities made him the perfect package for the position."

Championing Service Leavers

Douglas made an immediate impression, and now plays a key role in championing the value in employing Service Leavers, with the ability to match potential employees to very specific company roles based on the remit of their Service. He has since identified the need for more staff, and the company has recruited three more employees from a military background, two of whom are still with the organisation as engineers.

Continued Support

When it comes to ongoing support for ex-Service personnel in their new role, John explains that the company is committed to ensuring there is ample opportunity for personal and professional development.

"While we do look for a specific skillset to enter a role, we are very flexible when it comes to any gaps a new employee might have and endeavour to fill these through ongoing development and specialised intensive training courses. As well as being good for the company, our dedication to development is of lasting benefit to individuals, who can carry their new skills into other roles and industries in the future.

"We recently launched a lucrative new product, with one of our ex-Service engineers playing an integral part in the design and development. Being involved in this process and seeing the final outcome gave him real job satisfaction, and we recognise how well this aspect of the role aligns with the sense of purpose and achievement often enjoyed by Service Leavers in their former roles."

Untapped Talent

It is this determination to get stuck in and make their mark which John says other employers should consider when making the decision to actively recruit Service Leavers and veterans.

“In my experience, when we have candidates coming in from a Service background, they don’t want the job for the sake of having a job; they want the job because they recognise the opportunity to utilise, adapt and develop their existing skills. It’s a two-way street, but if you can demonstrate to veterans that you require their skills and will value their contribution, then more often than not, they will grasp the opportunity firmly with both hands and prove themselves to be incredibly hard-working, resourceful and reliable employees. There’s a whole pool of untapped talent out there, and my advice to any employers considering recruiting from the ex-Service community would be to go for it.”

Conclusions

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Conclusions

This report covers significant ground – subject matter that proved to be far more complex and wide ranging than I envisaged when I set out to produce it – but it has been a fascinating and thought-provoking journey.

I set out to answer two questions. The first was whether everything possible was being done to support and deliver meaningful and sustained employment for the veterans community. The second was whether the veterans community was being given every opportunity to maximise its contribution to Scotland's workplaces, economy and society. On both counts I have concluded that the answer is largely encouraging but there is no room for complacency and I am convinced that more can and needs to be done. By no stretch of the imagination does the system need overhauled.

As I have written and spoken about on many occasions previously, I consider Scotland to have a good support structure for those in the veterans community who need assistance, based on extensive and good quality public services and an effective charitable sector. This report draws on many of the good examples I have seen across the fields of employability, learning and skills. My hope is that the recommendations will help see the good practice become more widespread.

The employment prospects for the next generation of veterans should be greatly enhanced. The overall skills and educational attainment of Service personnel will improve over the coming years with increasing numbers of well-educated and highly-skilled individuals joining the Armed Forces. I have concluded that across Scotland we need to ensure that the most is made of the skills and experience of these talented people when they leave the military. It will be to the benefit of not only those individuals and their families but also to Scotland's economy and communities.

I am also convinced that work is still required to help shift the attitudes towards, and perceptions of, veterans amongst some employers, the media and members of the public, so that they are seen predominantly as net contributors and assets to Scotland, rather than as a drain on public resources. Much progress has been made on this over the past few years but more can and should be done. The Scottish Government, politicians at all levels (from the First Minister down), leaders in the veterans charitable sector, the media, business leaders, employers and the veterans community itself all have a part to play in projecting a positive and constructive image of veterans.

Finally, Scotland suffers from some significant and well documented skills gaps in certain sectors and from demographic challenges, especially in rural and remote areas. The veterans community is ideally suited to provide part of the solution to both of these issues. Strategic leadership and oversight from the Scottish Government will be required to ensure that long-term approaches are taken and that the veterans community is best utilised to fill some of the skills gaps and reverse the population flight in areas of the country. This report highlights a number of practical examples and offers a series of recommendations for actions that will, I believe, help fulfil these strategic ambitions.

I have deliberately set a series of challenging recommendations for the Scottish Government and others but sincerely believe that a concerted and ambitious approach to this agenda can reap significant rewards for the ex-Service community and Scotland alike. I am optimistic about the future prospects for veterans and look forward to continuing to play my part in making the changes set out in this report a reality.

Recommendations and Findings

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Recommendations and Findings

SECURING EMPLOYMENT

Recommendation 1 - Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group

The Scottish Government should establish a Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group of key partners to provide strategic leadership and to oversee the activity required to fulfil the ambitions of more, and better, employment opportunities for veterans, as articulated in this report and in *Renewing Our Commitments*.

The working group should include core participation from the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Local Government representation, Ministry of Defence (MOD)/ Career Transition Partnership (CTP), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and Veterans Scotland.

Recommendation 2 – Scottish Veterans Fund

The Scottish Government should support proposals that promote employability and increase job opportunities amongst the veterans community as the priority when allocating resources from the Scottish Veterans Fund.

Recommendation 3 – Filling the Skills Gap

The Scottish Government to review how the veterans community could be most effectively utilised to fill the known skills gaps in key sectors like education, health, IT, engineering, construction, finance and insurance. In doing so, it should consider whether its recent initiative to attract former oil and gas workers into teaching in the North East of Scotland should be replicated for the veterans community. This recommendation should be considered by the Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (see Recommendation 1) as one of its early priorities.

Recommendation 4 – Employability Pilot Scheme

The Scottish Government should initiate and co-ordinate a regional employability pilot project, based in an area where there is a high military and veteran population. The purpose should be to deliver an increased number of meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities for Service Leavers, veterans, and spouses and partners.

The pilot should involve the full range of organisations with an interest in the development of the local economy, the sustainability of its communities and the particular contribution that veterans and families can make to these ambitions. It should, therefore, see core participation from the Scottish Government, Local Government, Ministry of Defence, Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, Skills Development Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions/Job Centre Plus, Community Planning Partnership(s), employers, local college(s), and representatives of local veterans' families.

Recommendation 5 - Research and Evaluation

The Scottish Government should commission research to provide analysis of the current baseline of the employment situation for the veterans community and to evaluate the impact of national and local initiatives to improve job prospects.

Appendix – Recommendations and Findings

Recommendation 6 – Work Placements

The Scottish Government should work with employers – both small and large - to find ways of offering more placements to Service Leavers, veterans, spouses and partners. This should be in addition to those offered by Career Transition Partnership.

Finding 1 – Mentoring

I would like to see more employers establishing networks of employees who can be a source of advice and mentoring support for Service Leavers and veterans, both those considering joining the organisation and those employed. I will continue to raise this suggestion with employers and encourage them to emulate the examples cited.

QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

Recommendation 7 - Improving Literacy and Numeracy

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP), Local Authority community-based support services, colleges, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and charities should promote the benefits of improved literacy and numeracy skills amongst Service Leavers and veterans, directing them to appropriate community-based support, including the 'Big Plus' initiative. The aim should be to generate greater awareness amongst veterans with specific needs, their families and employers in order that learning opportunities can be accessed more readily.

Recommendation 8 - Recognition of Qualifications and Skills

The Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group (see Recommendation 1) should produce a plan for building understanding and recognition amongst Scottish employers (especially SMEs) of the skills and qualifications gained in the military. The Group should also consider whether the current system for translating and mapping qualifications could be simplified and how it might be better utilised and understood.

Recommendation 9 - Support for the Long-Term

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) should build on their existing relationship with the aim of ensuring Service Leavers and veterans have seamless access to SDS once their period of support from CTP comes to an end. This will be particularly important for Early Service Leavers and others in danger of 'falling between the gaps'.

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Recommendation 10 - Veterans Attending College

Colleges Scotland to work with their members to engage the veterans sector more closely in order to promote the benefits of, and opportunities to participate in, college education. Ultimately the outcome should be an increase in numbers from the veterans community taking up college places.

Appendix – Recommendations and Findings

Recommendation 11 - Modern Apprenticeships

The Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and Colleges Scotland should develop a plan to promote the Modern Apprenticeship programme to Early Service Leavers, veterans who would benefit from up-skilling or retraining, and spouses and partners.

Recommendation 12 - Sponsorship at College

The Scottish Government should work with employers to identify ways of supporting, and perhaps incentivising, sponsorship schemes that will allow a greater number of Service Leavers and veterans to undertake college studies in conjunction with full time employment.

Recommendation 13 - Access Thresholds

In fulfilling the recommendations from the Commission on Widening Access, all universities should consider how access thresholds can be specifically applied to the veterans community. Subsequently, they should advertise and promote these thresholds widely across the military and veterans sectors.

Recommendation 14 - Articulation

The Scottish Funding Council, universities and colleges to specifically consider the veterans community as they embark on the expansion of articulation, as recommended by the Commission on Widening Access.

Recommendation 15 - Information about Colleges and Universities

The Scottish Funding Council should work with relevant organisations - including Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and Student Awards Agency Scotland - to produce material designed specifically for the veterans community. This should include information about finance and the support available for those enrolling at college or university. Subsequently, this material should be made available widely amongst the serving and veterans communities, and those like CTP and SDS who support them.

Recommendation 16 – Veterans Network/Champions in Colleges and Universities

Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland should work with their members and Veterans Scotland to establish a network of champions across all colleges and universities. The champions can provide the first point of contact for members of the ex-Service community applying for, or undertaking, further and higher education. They should also consider offering mentoring, advice on applications and funding, and be part of the wider champions network in Scotland.

Appendix – Recommendations and Findings

Finding 2 – Flexible Learning

Flexible learning options offer a significant, yet under-utilised, opportunity for members of the veterans community. It is a subject that deserves further consideration and I look forward to engaging with Colleges Scotland, and others, over the coming months.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Recommendation 17 - Parliamentary Scrutiny of Veterans Issues

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work should in due course report the progress made against implementing the recommendations in this report (and my two previous reports) to the Scottish Parliament. The aim should be to raise the profile of veterans issues amongst Parliamentarians and provide them with the information necessary to scrutinise the Scottish Government's work in this field.

Recommendation 18 - Jobs within the Scottish Government

The Scottish Government to assess its current and future recruitment policies with a view to identifying opportunities to better target and support the veterans community in securing Scottish Government jobs. In doing so, it should consider Police Scotland's approach of providing tailored information, personal support in completing applications, and advice in preparing for interviews. Mentoring from ex-Service personnel within the civil service is likely to play a crucial role.

Recommendation 19 - Jobs within NHS Scotland

NHS Scotland and individual Health Boards should develop and deliver commitments made at the last Armed Forces and Veterans Joint Group meeting to utilise the talents of the veterans community and provide better support and advice to those applying for jobs within the NHS.

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This publication is available at www.gov.scot

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Area 1J South
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EH6 6QQ

ISBN: 978-1-78652-585-7

Published by The Scottish Veterans Commission, November 2016