

Written evidence submitted by Forces in Mind Trust (DIS0001)

Submission from Forces in Mind Trust to the Call for Evidence by the Scottish Affairs Committee on Defence in Scotland: Military Personnel and Estate

Introduction

Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) was established in 2011 by a £35 million endowment from the Big Lottery Fund (now The National Lottery Community Fund). Our vision is for all ex-Service personnel and their families to lead fulfilled civilian lives, and our mission is to enable successful sustainable transition by identifying the barriers to successful transition, finding out what works to address these barriers and then using this evidence to bring about change that has a sustainable positive impact on ex-Service people and their families.

Our remit is UK-wide, yet we often fund specialist reports in each of the devolved nations. We fund research in seven areas: Housing, Employment, Health, Finance, Criminal Justice System, Relationships, and under our Enabler Programme which supports greater coordination within the Service charity sector and improved understanding of the Armed Forces Community.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and are available to brief you further should you wish. Given our remit outlined above, this response is wide in scope. Others are perhaps better placed to respond to the specific questions posed in the Call for Evidence, so we have chosen to provide an overview of available evidence with a focus on the current and future needs of veterans in Scotland. Some of the future needs identified in this response will be as a result of the UK's changing defence priorities, some will be the result of future societal changes, and some will be ongoing challenges yet to be addressed. All the research mentioned in this response, together with other UK and international research on the Armed Forces Community, is hosted on the FiMT Veterans & Families Research Hub¹.

It is estimated that there are 2.5million veterans in the UK with 15,000 personnel leaving the Armed Forces each year to reintegrate into civilian life. It is also estimated that 250,000 of these veterans live in Scotland with 1,800 Service leavers choosing to reside in Scotland each year². While the majority of veterans and their families make a successful transition into civilian life, a minority struggle. Below we have set out some of the issues currently faced by veterans in Scotland before focusing on future needs.

Current needs of veterans and families in Scotland

Health and wellbeing

Research has shown that just under half of Scotland's adult ex-Service community have experienced difficulties, with the most common issues being relationship difficulties, isolation, self-care and mobility problems. One fifth of the ex-Service community in Scotland have also been found to have unpaid caring responsibilities, higher than the national average³. In the same research, it was found that over half of the adult ex-Service community had a long-term illness or disability and 43% were living with a long-term health condition that limits their daily activities.

¹ <https://www.vfrhub.com/fimt-research-centre/>

² https://scottishveteranscommissioner.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SVC_Positive_Futures_Housing_June_2021.pdf

³ Poppy Scotland (2014): Health and welfare of the ex-Service community in Scotland

We welcomed the commitment made by the Scottish Government to make veterans' mental health a key priority and research has indicated that Scotland now has one of the most robust mental health and related health provision for veterans in the UK, together with a thriving specialist statutory and voluntary sector⁴. However, gaps in provision remain including a lack of targeted resources to meet the needs of veterans, their families, and their carers. This requires on-going collaboration of provision between specialist and mainstream services, more support for those living in rural and urban areas, and a need for a more co-ordinated approach between the statutory and voluntary sectors to improve local, multi-agency partnerships⁵.

In 2018 FiMT awarded a three-year grant to the University of Glasgow to examine *Trends in Scottish Veterans' Health*. Early findings have been positive and, while the risk of cardiovascular disease is higher in Scottish veterans than in the wider community and tobacco use in the military remains higher than in civilians, the risk of them developing heart disease is reducing⁶. The study has also found that Scottish veterans are at no greater risk of developing dementia than the wider community⁷. We will disseminate the final report in due course and a Scottish Veterans Health Research Group has been set up to foster cooperation and dissemination of the research.

Housing

While data on homelessness is patchy, it has been reported that Scottish veterans are 10% more likely to become homeless than English veterans, and most local authority lists in Scotland have received applications from ex-Service personnel⁸. Positive steps have been made recently, and the Armed Forces Covenant, together with key policies from the UK and Scottish governments, have driven positive change, resulting in smoother transitions for Service leavers compared to a decade ago. However, some Service leavers still face significant difficulties and can get lost in the complexities of the civilian housing system. Problems also remain in a lack of preparation from Service personnel, and many have unrealistic expectations of the civilian housing market⁹. These issues remain despite improvements in the housing information provided by the Armed Forces and the UK and Scottish governments. Collaborative working between government, charities and support organisations remains key.

Employment

Scotland is home to over 72,000 working veterans and over 7,000 self-employed veterans¹⁰. Whilst employment levels for ex-Service personnel are high across the UK, some ex-Service personnel and their families encounter challenges finding and sustaining suitable employment. Research by the Veterans Work consortium found that 26% of veterans living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland found the process of finding the right job 'very difficult', the highest percentage across the UK, and 30% of ex-Service personnel living in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland reported that they were earning 'less' or 'considerably less' than they had hoped¹¹. Challenges in finding suitable employment can include trouble translating military skills to civilian employers and the perception that employing people from the military could be a risk for employers¹².

⁴ Community Innovations Enterprise (2016): Call to Mind: Scotland

⁵ FiMT Research Centre (2020): Mental Health Snapshot

⁶ Bergman et al (2021): Trends in cardiovascular disease in Scottish military veterans: a retrospective cohort study

⁷ Bergman et al (2021): Dementia in Scottish military veterans: early evidence from a retrospective cohort study

⁸ University of York (2014): Meeting the Housing and Support Needs of Single Veterans in Great Britain

⁹ University of Stirling (2020): Working Together to Meet the Housing Needs of Ex-Service Personnel

¹⁰ Warwick Institute for Employment Research (2018): Self-employment and the Armed Forces Community

¹¹ Deloitte (2018): Veterans Work: Moving on

A 2018 YouGov survey¹³ examined public perceptions of ex-Service personnel and, like UK-wide opinion, 12% of respondents in Scotland believed that ex-Service personnel were unemployable. 39% of Scottish respondents also believed that ex-Service personnel were institutionalised and 49% believed that they were mentally damaged from their time in Service. Many civilian employers are not aware of the ex-Service community as a pool of potential employees and are unaware of the excellent and unique skills they can bring to an organisation. A 2018 survey of employers across Great Britain¹⁴ found that only 6% of organisations in Scotland had signed the Armed Forces Covenant and only 6% were Employer Recognition Scheme award holders. More therefore needs to be done in Scotland and across the UK to build civilian employers' awareness of the Armed Forces community, change the way they see ex-Service personnel and improve the translation of military skills. While we welcome the recent work of the Scottish Government and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) to develop a framework for translating military qualifications, it is limited in its ability to enable ex-Service personnel to readily communicate the skills they have developed through obtaining the qualifications¹⁵.

Future needs of veterans and families in Scotland.

In May 2021, we published a new report on future trends and their impact on the Armed Forces Community, *Lifting Our Sights: Beyond 2030*¹⁶. Like the UK Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, the report examines the impact of future trends on the UK, but also explores how these trends will impact on the Armed Forces Community as they transition from the Armed Forces to civilian life over the next decade and beyond, as well as examining the impact on the statutory, voluntary and private organisations that support them.

Lifting Our Sights identifies the challenges and opportunities of 32 future trends and the changes needed to ensure that all ex-Service personnel and their families make a successful and sustainable transition, providing value to the communities into which they integrate. Below we have picked out a few of the trends relevant to this consultation:

- **Changing characteristics of conflict.** Like the Integrated Review, *Lifting Our Sights* identifies the changing characteristics of conflict and the potentially resulting increase in the number of transitioning personnel. Communities in Scotland, like the rest of the UK, should expect to see a leaner military and fewer instances of those who have been exposed to physical conflict. An increase in the number of Service leavers may put pressure on local authorities, squeeze housing and result in higher rates of individuals seeking employment. With new forms of conflict, we will also see an increasing demand for digital and technical skills over physical/manual labouring ability and the Armed Forces will attract different applicants who will have their own needs and opportunities on transition. While there may be fewer physical casualties, new forms of engagement may have lasting psychological impacts, increasing incidents of mental health problems in veterans and their families. Health services should be prepared to adapt to the changing needs of transitioning personnel and work with the Ministry of Defence to identify and understand those needs.
- **Regions of connection.** Different regions across the UK are more predisposed to the military than others. Across Scotland there are strong cultural and economic ties to the military and in some areas, like areas in the rest of the UK, signing up to the Armed Forces is considered a

¹² Kantar Futures (2017): The Transition Mapping Study 2017

¹³ YouGov (2018): Public perceptions of veterans and the Armed Forces

¹⁴ Shared Intelligence and NatCen (2019): Benefit not Burden

¹⁵ GoodPeople (2020): A better working future for ex-Service personnel

¹⁶ Future Agenda (2021): *Lifting Our Sights: Beyond 2030*

gateway to new and better opportunities. If the planned personnel and estate reductions go ahead, there are likely to be consequences for local communities. With fewer uniformed personnel visible to the public and lower defence-driven economic activity, general awareness of the Armed Forces may decline. Without proactive local engagement and education initiatives, the Armed Forces may become misunderstood, making it harder for those transitioning to communicate their value both socially and professionally.

- **Smarter talent.** Modern warfare will require highly qualified recruits. The Armed Forces will also offer recruits leading-edge training which will be highly regarded in civilian life and provide a future talent pool. To ensure civilian employers can see and access the benefits of future transitioning personnel, there needs to be better and stronger pathways between commercial technology-based firms and those in or transitioning from the military. This will require a leading role from those in senior positions within the military and civilian world.
- **Data and automation.** Deeper and wider digitisation will provide previously unknown levels of information and foresight. There will be a growing understanding that data is a national asset and requires protection. Nations will go beyond defending their data assets to building a data economy of their own. Better data on transitioning personnel and their families will also lead to better outcomes and the ability to identify and prioritise the most vulnerable veterans in society. There is currently limited information on veterans and their needs and this needs to improve. The inclusion of a question on veteran status in the 2022 census will help to address this gap but the Scottish and UK Government will need to ensure census data is cross-referenced with existing data sources to be of any use.

While we cannot be sure yet of the level of impact each of the trends identified in *Lifting Our Sights* will have, the Government, and others, can act now to ensure they are prepared for the upcoming challenges and take advantage of any opportunities. The report identifies four areas where priority action is needed, and these will be necessary if the Government is to succeed in its mission of making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran, and if the Scottish Government is to succeed in its ambition to make Scotland the destination of choice for Service leavers:

1. **Empowering the system.** Ensuring that the wider military and civilian systems, organisations and infrastructures that matter most have a collective understanding of the transition journey, and are supported by more collaborative data sharing, alongside greater clarity around measurement and accountability. This will require better data to understand the demographics, locations and needs of veterans. FiMT recently awarded a three-year grant to the University of Edinburgh, in partnership with Edinburgh Napier University, to conduct research into the experiences of veterans living in Scotland. This will help to address the current lack of up to date and in-depth data on veterans in Scotland¹⁷. We also continue to fund Veterans Scotland to deliver the Informing Scotland project which seeks to better inform local authorities in Scotland of veterans and their needs¹⁸.
2. **Personalising the transition process.** Shifting support services so that transition is defined by the individual circumstances of serving personnel and their families. An important component of this shift is likely to be earlier dialogue, leading to earlier, pre-emptive support activity. This will require regular updates to transition provision to ensure it responds to needs of current and future Service leavers.

¹⁷ <https://www.fim-trust.org/news-policy-item/forces-in-mind-trust-awards-grant-to-examine-the-lived-experiences-of-veterans-living-in-scotland/>

¹⁸ <https://www.fim-trust.org/news-policy-item/forces-in-mind-trust-awards-funding-for-veterans-scotland-to-improve-support-for-the-armed-forces-in-scotland/>

3. **Empowering the civilian.** Equipping ex-Service personnel to lead successful and fulfilled lives by helping them to take more responsibility for their lives in the military and beyond. This will require wider awareness of the support already available to help personnel take control of their careers.
4. **Ensuring accurate perception.** Broadening and improving public understanding of the role of the Armed Forces and the transferrable skills of Service personnel at a time of major change in society, the world of work, and the capabilities of the Armed Forces. This will require proactive initiatives to help people better understand the Armed Forces, and to tackle the rise of misinformation, particularly on social media.

We would urge you to read *Lifting Our Sights* and use it to ensure that planning for the next decade is coherent, comprehensive, and collaborative. This will not only benefit the Armed Forces Community, but the statutory, voluntary and private organisations that support them. Alongside the report, we have developed several toolkits¹⁹, including one for the public sector, to help organisation prepare for and adapt to the changing nature of UK society.

If you would like to be briefed further on any of the information provided in this response, or on FiMT's wider programme of work, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Warmest regards,

Mike Ellicock

Chief Executive, Forces in Mind Trust

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¹⁹ <https://www.liftingoursights.org.uk/toolkit/>