

Perceptions of UK armed forces ex-service personnel

On behalf of the Office for Veterans' Affairs

November 2022



YouGov[®]

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Background

The Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) leads the UK Government's effort in driving towards making the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran.

Previous research with the general public shows that, while top-of-mind associations with ex-service personnel are likely to be positive, many believe that service leaves people in a worse mental, physical or emotional position than when they started serving.¹

To that end, the OVA commissioned research to improve understanding around perceptions of UK armed forces (UKAF) ex-service personnel across the general public and employers which will help to inform and shape communication and policy initiatives.

Approach

The findings in this report are based on two stages of research undertaken by YouGov – quantitative online surveys and qualitative focus groups and interviews.

The quantitative stage comprised one consistent survey across three separate sample groups:

1. A large-scale, representative sample of 12,531 people from across the United Kingdom (UK). This was nationally representative by age, gender, region, social grade, education level, and ethnicity.

The quotas on ethnicity reflected the UK population according to the overall proportion of respondents from white or ethnic minority backgrounds. The sample was not representative of individual categories of ethnicity and caution should be taken when interpreting these figures.

The devolved nations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) were deliberately oversampled on a representative basis in order to provide robust sub-group understanding and were then down-weighted in the final tables to provide an accurate view of the UK as a whole

¹ [*Forces in Mind, Ministry of Defence, and British Army: Public Perceptions of Veterans and the Armed forces \(2018\)*](#)

2. A sample of 1,022 senior decision-makers within UK employers, representative of employers by business size (number of employees), sector, and industry.
3. A sample of 549 healthcare professionals, including both NHS and private sector workers. The NHS proportion was sampled and weighted to be representative of the NHS workforce.

Fieldwork for the quantitative stage was conducted between 1st and 23rd March 2022.

The qualitative fieldwork took place between 9th May and 9th June 2022. It comprised a total of 11 focus groups with the public and five depth interviews with military journalists. All participants for the focus groups were recruited from the YouGov panel. All groups contained a mixture of age, gender, social grade, and region, and a mixture of views on the armed forces. All focus groups lasted 90 minutes and were conducted online using text-based methodology. The depth interviews took place over the telephone or on Zoom.

Where available and appropriate, this report contains some comparison to the 2018 research with Forces in Mind or previous polling undertaken by the Cabinet Office. Comparisons are provided for illustrative purposes only as there are differences in approach or methodology. The 2018 polling used the phrase “people who have previously served in the UK armed forces” rather than “UK armed forces ex-service personnel”. The Cabinet Office figures are based on a politically representative sample of GB adults rather than a nationally representative sample of UK adults.

Unless otherwise stated, figures and percentages presented are from the quantitative online surveys. All analysis is conducted to two decimal places. Figures in charts or images may not sum to 100% due to rounding or due to the question allowing multiple selections.

Findings from the qualitative research are noted as “the qualitative research”, “focus groups” or “interviews”. Due to the small sample nature of the qualitative research, no findings are statistically significant; the qualitative research adds flavour and depth to the quantitative findings.

Recommendations

Increase visibility of existing support

The overarching recommendation to improve public perceptions of UK armed forces ex-service personnel is to increase the visibility of support available.

Provide more information & guidance for employers

Information and guidance are well received by employers and the OVA should build on this as the appetite is clear. Information should be focussed on the diverse range of skills and benefits ex-service personnel can bring to employers

Challenge perceptions around mental health

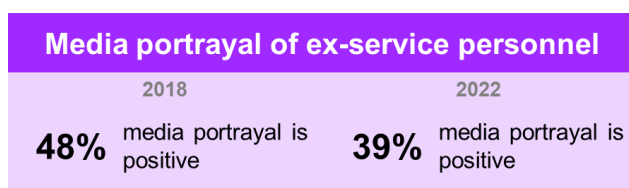
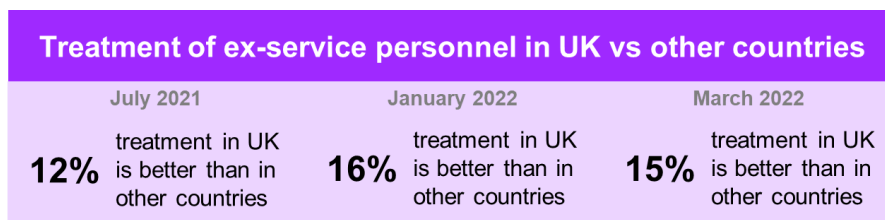
There continue to be misconceptions around the mental health of ex-service personnel. Further communications may be needed to help the general public, employers, and healthcare professionals understand what challenges ex-service personnel do or do not experience.

Target specific groups with tailored messaging

The OVA should be mindful that different groups across the UK have different attitudes around the UK armed forces and ex-service personnel. Messaging should be tailored to the needs and interests of each group where possible.

Key findings

Comparisons to previous research



Comparisons are provided for illustrative purposes only. Please see 'Approach' section for more details.

Overall perceptions

- Based on the findings from this study, 15% of the general public think that the government is effective in supporting UK armed forces ex-service personnel. In contrast, 43% feel that the government is not effective in supporting ex-service personnel.
- Over half (54%) of the general public think that ex-service personnel receive too little recognition from the government - which places ex-forces personnel third in terms of a lack of recognition behind NHS staff (59%) and social care staff (66%).
- While there is not a single outstanding association made by the general public with UK armed forces ex-service personnel, the most commonly held perception is that they are forgotten/ left behind/ ignored (13%). This is followed by the positive perception that they are brave/ courageous (10%).
- Perceptions are largely shaped by personal experience of ex-service personnel. The qualitative research found that those with first-hand experience of UK armed forces ex-service personnel were generally more empathetic while those who lacked experience were less positive and drew on negative media stories to shape their opinions.

- 39% of the general public think that UK armed forces ex-service personnel are portrayed positively in the media. This is almost double the number who think they are portrayed negatively (20%).
- The qualitative research found that the majority generally feel positive towards ex-service personnel but are more ambivalent around the wider armed forces. Positive feelings are inspired by respect for their bravery and sacrifice while negative feelings related to pacifism and negative news stories.
- TV news (36%) is the most commonly mentioned source of information considered important in informing opinion of UK armed forces ex-service personnel. This is followed by TV documentaries (33%) and military charities (30%).

Provision of support

- More than two-fifths of the UK public do not think the government looks after ex-service personnel (45%), and this rises to just over half of healthcare workers (52%). However, there is a fair degree of uncertainty – a fifth of the public are unsure (21%).
- One in seven of the UK public think that the UK government's treatment of ex-service personnel is better than other countries (14%), while a fifth think the treatment is about the same (21%). Uncertainty remains high, with a third of the general public stating that they do not know how UK treatment compares to elsewhere (33%).
- Participants in the qualitative research felt that in the USA, ex-service personnel are respected by both the public and government - but they were conscious this connection was influenced by media (e.g. Hollywood movies).
- Perceptions of specific areas of government support for ex-service personnel are low and overshadowed by uncertainty – one in seven think that support with life-changing injuries is effective (15%), but a quarter are unsure (26%).

Employment

- Many workers think that ex-service personnel would bring positive characteristics or skills to their workplace, with employers particularly likely to

think they would bring a strong work ethic (71% vs 62% working public) and resilience (64%, 54%).

- The vast majority of workers feel comfortable working with UK armed forces ex-service personnel and only around one in seven think there are risks in doing so.
- Around a third of each group think that there would be no difference the difficulty of ex-service personnel versus civilians finding a meaningful and fulfilling job outside the military. Around one in ten think it would be easier for ex-service personnel while half think it would be more difficult.
- Similarly, an overwhelming majority of each group think that ex-service personnel need additional support to move into civilian employment.
- Despite this, only a quarter of those who have employed ex-service personnel offered any specific support or onboarding (24%).
- Employers have concerns about mental health issues (34%) if they were to employ ex-service personnel but see potential benefits around filling skills gaps (42%).

Community and health

- Around one in ten believe that it is easy to adjust to life after leaving the UK armed forces. The majority think that there is no difference in access to NHS care or family services – the ease/ difficulty of access is the same as civilians would experience.
- This perspective is upheld by healthcare workers – 75% of NHS workers believe that ex-service personnel have the same levels of access to NHS care as civilians. with NHS workers slightly more positive than private sector healthcare workers.
- However, ex-service personnel are associated with health issues – over two-thirds think that mental health problems affect ex-service personnel more than civilians.
- Participants in the qualitative research believed that ex-service personnel experience a sudden 'jolt' back into civilian life rather than a transition and this

lack of transition was felt to exacerbate mental health problems, though this was not the experience of the veterans who participated in the groups.

- There are mixed opinions around whether society values ex-service personnel, although the majority do think that ex-service personnel make valuable contributions to society.
- Qualitative participants who had knowledge of ex-service personnel challenged other participants' clichés around mental health problems and issues reintegrating to society.

Overall perceptions

The qualitative focus groups opened with a general discussion of both the UK armed forces and ex-service personnel. Within them, the majority of respondents felt generally positive towards ex-service personnel, though much more neutral towards the wider armed forces. Positive feelings were mostly inspired by the respect they had for those who have served for their country – most admire ex-service personnel for their bravery and sacrifice and admit that serving is not something that they would or could do. Neutral feelings related to the view that it is “just another job”, or that ex-service personnel are not seen in the same way as other employees. Although uncommon, some negative feelings were present and were often related to: pacifism; political opposition to certain conflicts; a belief that government money was being taken up which could be spent elsewhere; media stories of war crimes and brutality seen as going unpunished, though this was a minority view.

The Northern Ireland focus group was slightly more negative than the rest of the qualitative participants, influenced by some personal experiences with the armed forces in the recent past.

“Positive as it requires a lot of selflessness and discipline, many different aspects to it just to qualify and very hard work both physically and later mentally to deal with the situations they are involved in”

– General public, England

“I think it is a job, like any other” – General public, Wales

“It’s a 50/50 split for me. I have had friends and relatives who have been part of the armed forces at varying levels who have loved every part of it. But the press/news reports sway my opinion. The bullying headlines of recent years have changed my opinion slightly”

– Hiring position, small business

Perceptions of the different branches of the armed forces were broadly consistent, although a minority of respondents felt that members of the Royal Air Force or Navy

are a 'cut above', associating them with the officer class. Comparatively, members of the Army were viewed as being tougher or more resilient than those in other services.

"I'm inclined to believe they've been through something if they're a veteran so branch wouldn't be an issue" – General public, Northern Ireland

"Yes, mine do. I see the Army as the "strongest" and the RAF and Navy as less dominant/ scary" – Healthcare professional

Perceptions of ex-service personnel were mostly consistent regardless of when the person had served – respondents understand that the political climate as well as methods of warfare have changed but felt that the issues they faced remain the same. Nonetheless, some respondents noted that past wars such as World War One (WWI) and World War Two (WWII) required conscription, whereas modern service has not, and therefore the type of person who volunteers to serve is believed to be of a different mindset.

"Where they have served does not matter. It's the fact that they were ready to sacrifice themselves to protect us. Also the time they have had to be away from their families and young children" – General public, Wales

"In WW2 many had no choice, it was national service, but now there is a choice to sign up" – General public, England

When asked to rate the level of recognition various groups receive from the government, the UK public tend to think that each group gets 'too little' recognition – but the proportion who report this varies. Two-thirds think social care staff receive too little recognition (66%) compared to over a third who think the same of police officers (36%). Only a fifth think social care staff receive the right level of recognition (20%), while two-fifths believe police officers receive the right level (40%).

Given that overall levels of recognition from the government are thought to be low, the key point is how the recognition of UK Armed Forces ex-service personnel compares to other groups in society. A quarter think ex-service personnel receive about the right level of recognition (25%), which puts them on broadly equal footing with NHS staff and

social workers (both 26%). Over half (54%) of the public think that UK armed forces ex-service personnel receive too little recognition from the government. This places ex-service personnel joint third (with social workers) in terms of a lack of recognition - behind NHS staff (59%) and social care staff (66%).

Across employers and healthcare workers – over half think ex-service personnel receive too little recognition from the government (54%, 59% respectively), but where this group sits in comparison to other workers varies. For employers, ex-service personnel are second only to social care staff in terms of a lack of recognition (66%). Healthcare staff are more likely than other groups to think social care staff (77%), NHS staff (71%) and social workers (62%) lack recognition from the government.

Likelihood to think ex-service personnel receive too little recognition increases with age. Correspondingly, 18 to 29 year olds are least likely to think this (39%) while those aged 60 and over are most likely to hold this opinion (63%).

Among those with previous service in the UK armed forces, two-thirds (67%) say they think ex-service personnel receive too little recognition from the government compared to 53% among those who have not served in the UK armed forces. The same pattern is also evident among those with family members in the armed forces with 64% stating that ex-service personnel receive too little recognition, which drops to 48% among those who do not have family in the UK armed forces

Q: Do you feel each of the following groups receive too much, too little or the right amount of recognition from government?

Base: All general public (12,531)

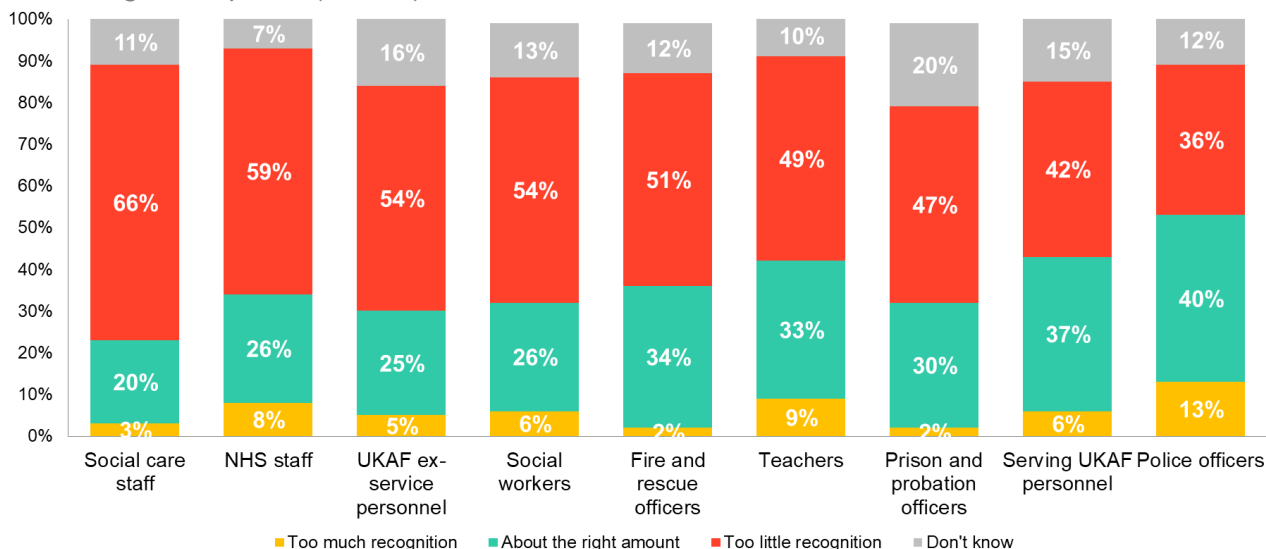


Figure 1. Degree of recognition that different groups receive from the government

Overall, 15% say that they think the government is effective in supporting UK armed forces ex-service personnel (net 4/5 responses where 5 is extremely effective) compared to 43% who say they feel it is not effective (net 1/2 responses where 1 is not effective at all). In comparison, teachers are thought to be supported the most effectively (21% net effective) while people living in deprived communities are supported least effectively (9% net effective).

Based on the findings of this study, perceptions across senior decision-makers in UK employers and workers in healthcare are similar to the overall public. Around one in seven think support for ex-service personnel is effective (15% employers, 12% healthcare) while over two-fifths think the government support for ex-service personnel is not effective (44% employers, 47% healthcare).

While there is relatively little volatility across sub-groups in terms of perceptions of how effective the government is in supporting UK armed forces ex-service personnel, bigger differences are evident in the numbers who think the government is *not* effective in supporting this group. Those aged over 50 have a more negative perception of government support compared to those under 30 with the highest number of those who think it is ineffective being those aged 50-59 (48%) compared to those aged 18 to 29 who are least sceptical (34%). Men are more likely to say the government is ineffective

(46%) compared to 41% of women. Across UK countries, people living in Wales are most negative (49%) compared to those living in England and Northern Ireland (43% for both) who are the least likely to think the government is ineffective. Those who are limited by a health condition/ disability are also much more likely to think the government is ineffective (48%) compared to those who are not limited by any disability (41%).

Notably, people from an ethnic minority are much more likely than white people to say the support from government is effective (20% vs 14% white). However, uncertainty is also higher for this group (23% do not know vs 18% white).

Those who previously served in the UK armed forces are more polarised than other groups. While a fifth (22%) of this group think the government is effective in their support of ex-service personnel, 50% think it is not effective.

Q: How effective or not do you feel the government is at supporting each of the following groups?

(By support we mean with e.g. initiatives, programmes, funding, advice services)

Base: All general public (12,531)

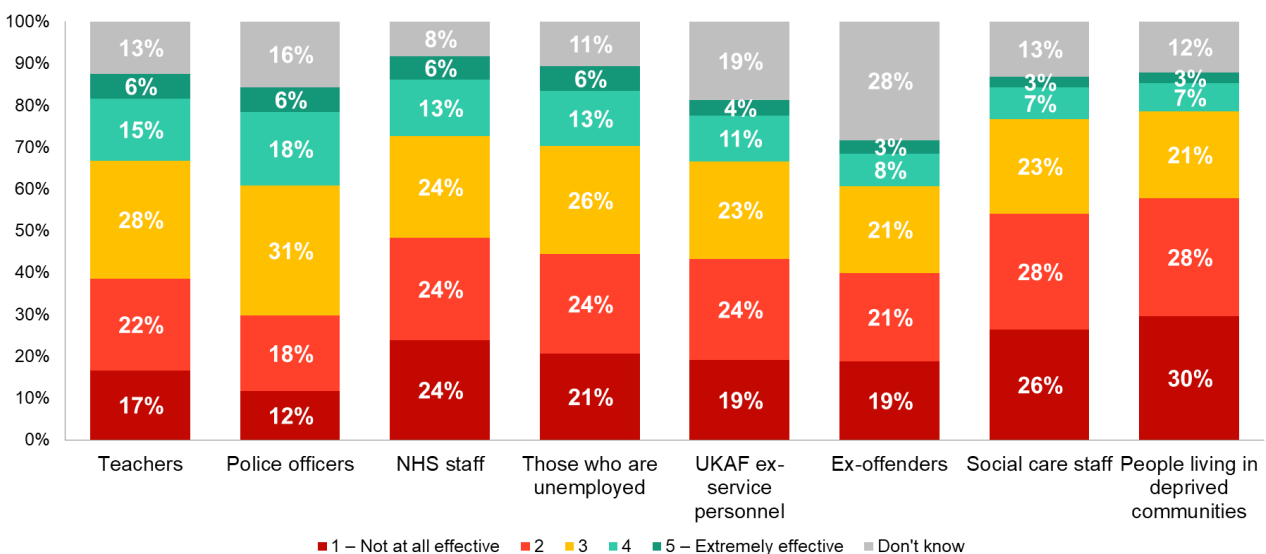


Figure 2. Governmental effectiveness at supporting different groups

The most common theme which UK adults in this study associate with UK armed forces ex-service personnel is that they are forgotten/ left behind/ ignored (13%). This is followed by the perception that they are brave/ courageous (10%), and then by people believing that they are traumatised/ have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (9%). These three themes are also the most commonly mentioned by employers and healthcare professionals.

Those who associate the theme of being forgotten/ left behind/ ignored with ex-services personnel are more likely to be older, peaking at 19% among those aged 60 and over. This sentiment is also significantly higher among those who previously served in the UK armed forces (17%) compared to those who have not served (12%). Additionally, more of those who have friends/ family members in the UK Armed Forces are likely to have this perception (19%) compared to those who do not (9%).

Associations with bravery and courage are higher among women (12%) than men (9%). While those with friends/ family in the armed forces (11%) are more likely to associate these themes with ex-service personnel than those without (9%), those who personally served in the UK Armed Forces (6%) are less likely to have this perception than those who have not served (10%).

Q: Thinking of UK armed forces ex-service personnel. What words or phrases come to mind? Please write in up to three below.
 Base: All general public (12,531)

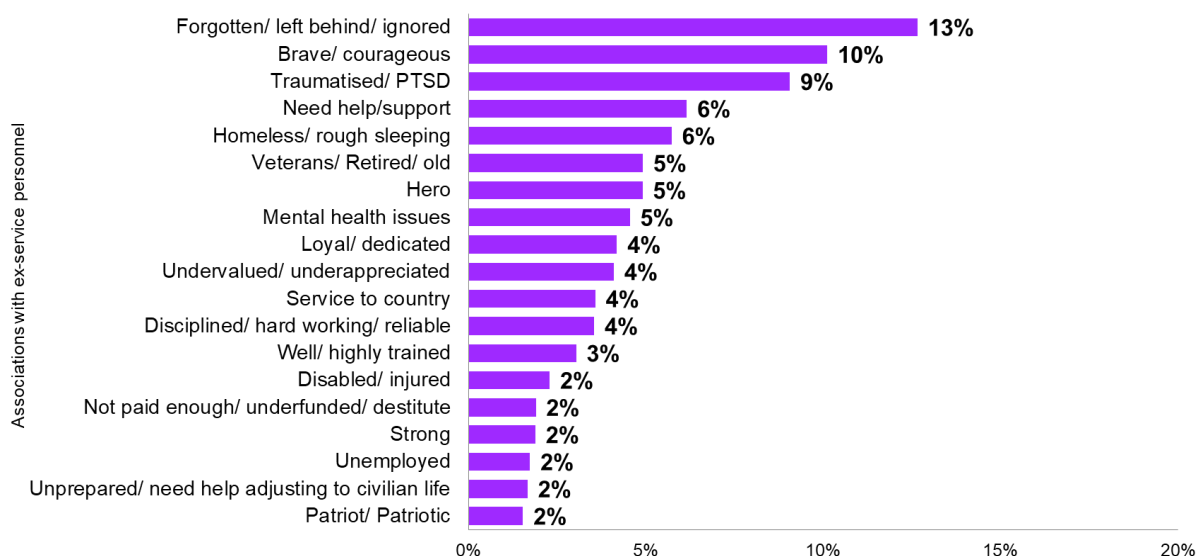


Figure 3. Words/phrases associated with UK armed forces ex-service personnel (coded)

In the qualitative research, respondents frequently associated ex-service personnel with words or phrases such as ‘resilience’, ‘strong work ethic’ and ‘dedication’. There was an assumption held that military service is hard and strenuous work and anyone that had a military role has these core values ingrained on the job. In addition to this, ex-service personnel themselves more often chose ‘trustworthiness’ than the general public due to the teamwork-focused nature of their previous military roles and the camaraderie they felt whilst serving. Words chosen to describe ex-service personnel

were almost all positive – although, on occasion, words like ‘inflexibility’ and ‘coldness’ were also used, influenced by the view that a strongly regimented workplace and traumatic experiences can have negative consequences on an individual.

"All of those skills that people learn in military life, you know, organisational skills, being on time, problem solving, being able to think beyond the immediate challenge and synthesise information, you know, for future challenges, react, stay calm. You know, all of those things."

– Journalist

"I think generally, people do respect our armed forces in a way they don't in some countries, but I'll be honest and say I also think we have a very difficult element of the veteran community that don't do the greater good any justice." – Journalist

Respondents were more likely to be positive about ex-service personnel when they have had first-hand experience with them – they were generally more empathetic, had positive experiences and were spontaneously aware of reintegration issues. On the other hand, those who lacked exposure to ex-service personnel were less positive and often drew on negative stories that they have seen in the media.

"Dedication yes - had a series of tasks to be completed in a remote location the person carried on until the bulk was completed knowing that the task was time critical - hugely appreciated their efforts"

– HR professional

"You have to be resilient to get through it all, I think. I know that a lot of veterans suffer from PTSD and other mental health problems, but that also needs resilience to get through" – General public, Scotland

"I chose inflexibility because they have learned to take orders without question and not think out of the box" – General public, Northern Ireland

The word ‘veteran’ itself often led to associations with the elderly (often male), the poppy, armistice, and PTSD. Interestingly, a noteworthy number of respondents also associated the word with America and the Vietnam war – it was felt that this

connection was influenced by media (e.g. Hollywood movies) as well as the feeling that ex-service personnel are held in a stronger regard by the American public and government than in the UK. More than one participant in the focus groups felt that the American population strongly value their conflicts by associating them with freedom – whereas, in the UK, perceptions of ex-service personnel may be interlinked with the politics of war and conflict, meaning support is more conditional.

“I tend to think of coverage of remembrance Sunday at the cenotaph”

– General public, England

“Vietnam - probably because of the films”

– Hiring position, large company

Some ex-service personnel liked the word ‘veteran’ as they associate it with a feeling of pride that comes as a result of serving for an extended period of time. However, a number of ex-service personnel did not feel like the word ‘veteran’ represents them. They did not necessarily dislike the phrase ‘veteran’, however some related it to old age and felt it describes someone who is suffering with PTSD (again, influenced by media representations). Phrases such as ‘ex-forces’ and ‘ex-service’ were more commonly used as a way of describing their military past.

“Very proud to be a veteran and even more so when we march at the Cenotaph each year in front of the public” – Ex-service personnel

“Very proud to have served and to have been a part an organisation which ever that might be” – Ex-service personnel

*“I don't particularly like the word "veteran" as it makes you sound like
a*

Chelsea Pensioner” – Ex-service personnel

“Older, struggling, brought to the forefront when necessary to say thank you, and then put away” – Ex-service personnel

“I always say ex-forces if asked” – Ex-service personnel

Overall, a greater proportion of the general public think that ex-service personnel are portrayed positively in the media (39%) than those who think they are portrayed negatively (20%). This is also true for the other two audiences – around two-fifths think



ex-service personnel are portrayed positively (42% employers, 40% healthcare) and only a quarter think the media portrayal is negative (24%, 23%).

The proportion who believe ex-service personnel have a positive portrayal declines with age. Among 18 to 29 year olds, 45% hold this opinion while this decreases to 36% among those aged 60 and over. Men (41%) are more likely to say they are portrayed positively compared to 38% of women. Additionally, those in England and Wales (40%) are more likely to say that the media portrays ex-service personnel positively compared to those living in Scotland (36%) and Northern Ireland (35%). There is also a large divergence in opinion across ethnicity, with white respondents being far more likely to say that they have a negative portrayal than those from an ethnic minority (21% vs 15%).

In comparison to 2018, when this question was previously asked, the number who said ex-service personnel are portrayed positively has fallen (48% in 2018 vs 39% in 2022). However, the number who think that they are portrayed negatively has remained roughly similar (18% in 2018, 20% in 2022).

Q: Thinking about how UK armed forces ex-service personnel are portrayed in the media, whether on television, in newspapers or elsewhere... Do you think they tend to be portrayed positively, negatively, or neutrally?

Base: All general public (12,531)

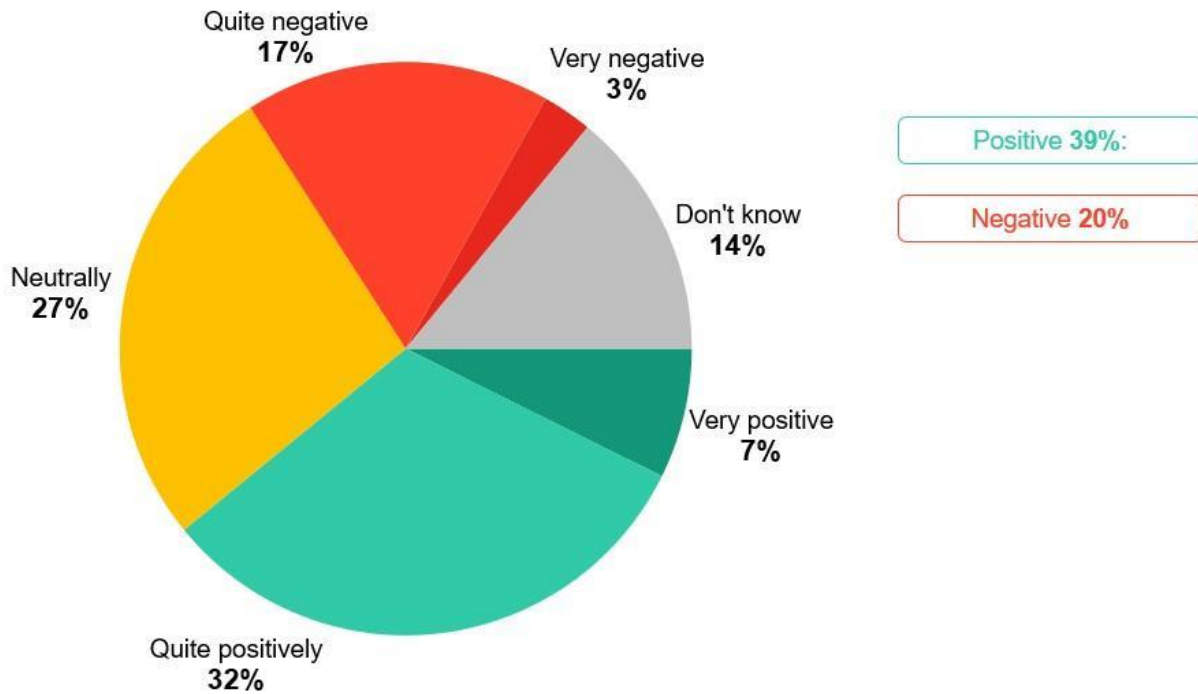


Figure 4. How UK armed forces ex-service personnel are portrayed in the media

TV news (36%) is the source most mentioned when people were asked which was the most important in informing their opinion of UK armed forces ex-services personnel. This was closely followed by TV documentaries (33%), and then by military charities (30%). These remain the top three sources of opinion for employers and healthcare workers.

Traditional media including TV documentaries, TV news and newspapers are all more widely mentioned by older age groups while films and social media are skewed towards younger people, especially the 18 to 29 bracket. Older people were also more likely to reference fundraising/ awareness campaigns and military charities.

Q: Which, if any, of the following would you say have been important in forming your opinion of UK armed forces ex-service personnel?

Base: All general public (12,531)

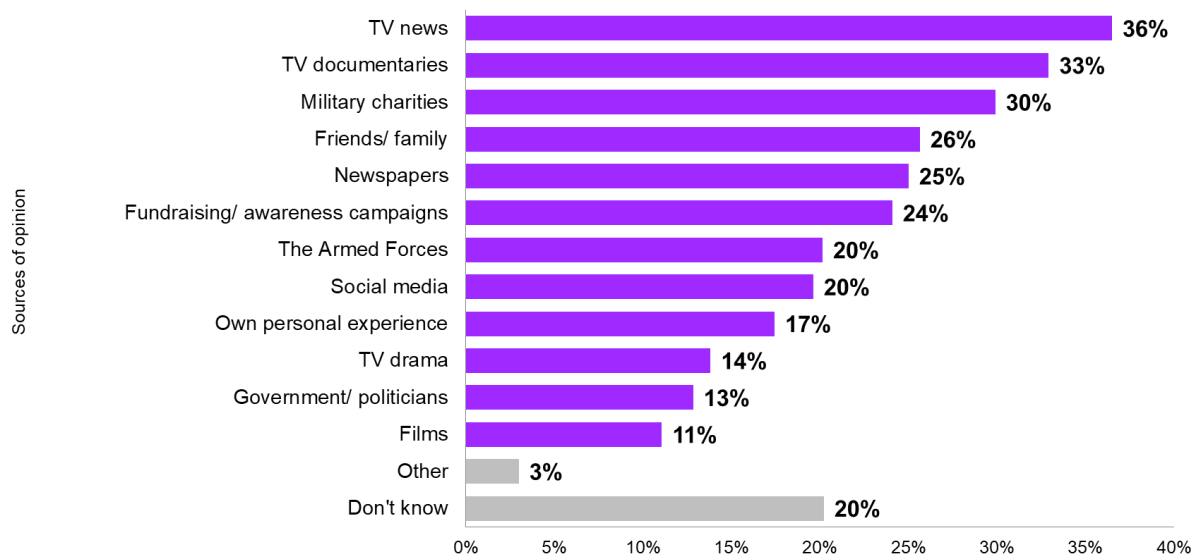


Figure 5. Sources considered important in informing opinion of UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Regional highlights

Figure 6. Key perceptions of ex-service personnel by nation

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| Gov't is effective at supporting UKAF ex-service personnel | 15% | 15% (S) | 13% | 13% | 16% |
| Gov't is ineffective at supporting UKAF ex-service personnel | 43% | 43% | 49% (E,NI) | 46% | 43% |
| UKAF portrayed in media: positively | 39% | 40% (S,NI) | 40% | 36% | 35% |
| UKAF portrayed in media: negatively | 20% | 20% | 20% | 22% (E) | 25% (E,W) |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Provision of support

45% of the UK public do not think the government looks after ex-service personnel (net responses of 1-2, where 1 is 'does not look after' and 5 is 'does look after') and this rises to just over half of healthcare workers (52%). However, it should be noted that there is a fair degree of uncertainty – around a quarter of the public and employers chose the midpoint of the scale and a considerable proportion of each audience simply do not know. Women in particular are more likely to be unsure, with a quarter (24%) saying they do not know if the government looks after ex-service personnel compared to just under a fifth (18%) of men.

There is a clear trend by age across the general public's sentiment – older respondents aged 60 and over are more likely to say the government does not look after ex-service personnel (51% vs 32% of 18 to 29s) while younger respondents are more likely to say the government does so (15% vs 10% 60+). However, younger respondents are also more likely to be uncertain (29% don't know, vs 16% 60+).

Those in Wales and Scotland tend to be more negative about the UK government's treatment of ex-service personnel – half of those nations feel the government does not look after ex-service personnel (50%, 49% respectively). Similarly, white respondents are more likely than those from an ethnic minority to say the government does not look after ex-service personnel (47% vs 30%). A fifth of ethnic minority respondents say the government does look after ex-service personnel (21%) – higher than any other demographic group within in the UK public.

Q: Please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

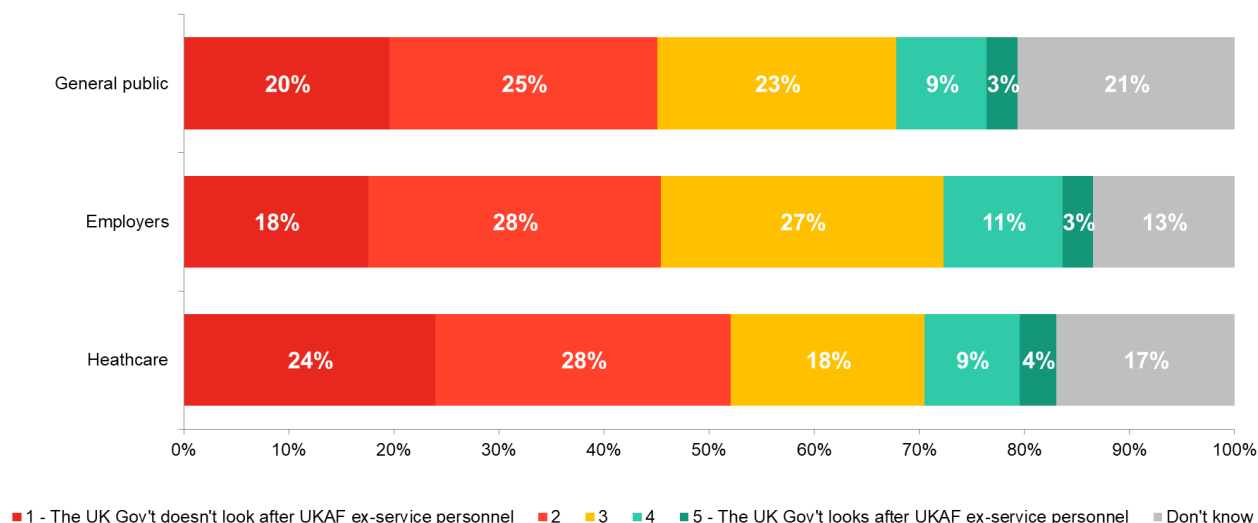


Figure 7. Whether the UK government does/ does not look after UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Participants in the qualitative groups felt that both emotional and practical support for ex-service personnel is currently lacking, and this lack of support translates into difficulties with reintegration into society.

“There are always the stories how they struggle to integrate in society, struggle with jobs and that they don’t get much support from the government” – General public, Scotland

This has not always been the case; participants commented that after World War Two there was a sense of respect for ex-service personnel, with many charities set up in order to offer long-term support. However, there is now a generational split, with younger members of the public being less likely to appreciate and admire ex-service personnel.

Some participants also commented that the lack of ‘visible’ conflict has meant that there is less awareness and sympathy towards ex-service personnel. Some ex-service personnel commented that they felt ‘invisible’ and ‘forgotten’.

“I think most of the public wear poppies for a few days and then don’t really think about them” – General public, Wales

“With World Wars, there were parades for those returning, but now it’s just a quiet exit” – General public, Northern Ireland

“I think older servicemen are treated more respectfully due to the scale and direct impact of WW1 and WW2” – Hiring position

“During conflicts like Iraq and Afghan, veterans seemed to get more notice. During the last decade the public seems to have moved on”

– Ex-service personnel

This picture of uncertainty in the current environment continues when juxtaposing the UK government’s treatment of ex-service personnel with other countries. One in seven think the UK government’s treatment of ex-service personnel is better than other countries (14%) and a fifth think it is about the same (21%), but around a third of the public are unsure (33%). Three in ten think the UK government’s current treatment of ex-service personnel is worse than in other countries (31%). Healthcare workers are a more unsure (26% employers, 35% healthcare) and employers are more likely to think treatment is the same (22%, 16%), but otherwise, the professional groups see broadly similar patterns – one in six agree that ex-service personnel are treated better in the UK than elsewhere (16%, 15%), while just over a third think treatment is worse (36%, 34%).

Consistent with the earlier findings, women tend to be more unsure with two-fifths being unsure if UK treatment is better or worse (39%) compared to just over a quarter of men (27%). There is also a clear age trend within the general public where older respondents have a lower opinion than younger respondents – almost two-fifths of those aged 60 and over think the government’s treatment of ex-service personnel is worse than other countries (38%) compared to only a fifth of 18 to 29 year olds (18%).

Also consistent with previous findings, there is a marked division by ethnicity with white respondents continuing to be more negative than ethnic minority respondents. A third of white respondents think UK treatment is worse than elsewhere compared to only a fifth of those from an ethnic minority (32% vs 20%). A quarter of respondents from an ethnic minority think the government treatment of UK armed forces ex-service personnel is better than in other countries (25%).

It appears that perceptions of the government’s treatment of ex-service personnel compared to other countries has remained broadly steady over the year. A similar question was asked by the Cabinet Office in July 2021 and January 2022 and the

proportions are in line with this study – one in seven think treatment in the UK is better (12% Jul-21, 16% Jan-22), a fifth believe it is about the same (22%, 19%), around three in ten think treatment is worse (29%, 27%), and around a third simply do not know (34%, 38%). Comparison is provided for illustrative purposes only as there are slight differences in methodology.

Q: Compared to other countries, how well or badly do you think the UK government treats UK armed forces ex-service personnel?

Base: All general public (12,531)

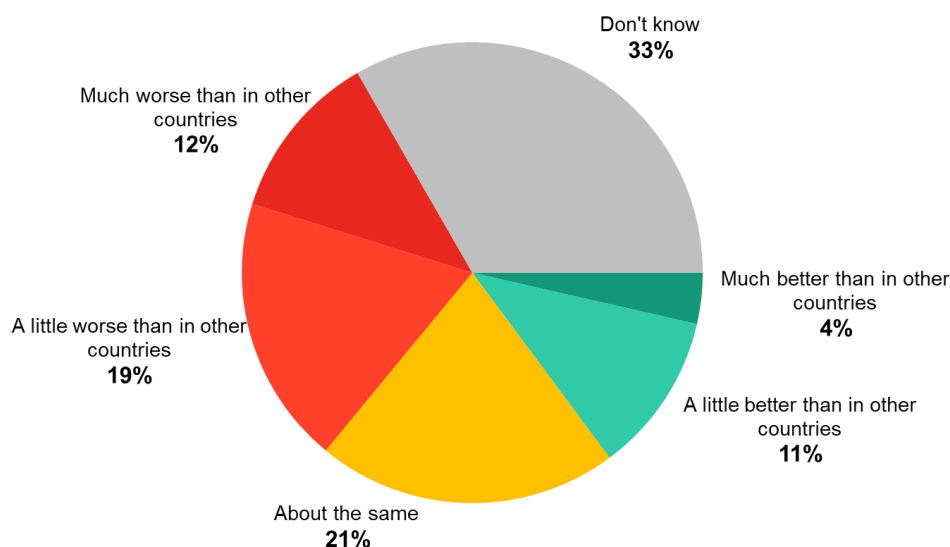


Figure 8. Treatment of UK armed forces ex-service personnel in comparison to other countries

Qualitative participants again compared treatment of UK ex-service personnel with the USA. As discussed, there is a perception that ex-service personnel in the USA are respected by the public and the government; they have ‘heroic’ status which means that they are perceived as being both admired and respected, and seen to have sufficient support.

“In this country nobody really cares but if you go to USA, serving and veterans are treated with respect and get a lot of benefits for having served” – Ex-service personnel

*“Governments love the military when they need them but ignore when things are quiet. The comparison with the US is very correct and I have worked for long periods with the US Navy and seen how those leaving get much higher recognition than here”
– Ex-service personnel*

“I think in some parts they are held in high esteem - however - judging by the number of ex-servicemen who are homeless or in prison - they don't get enough support.”

– General public, Northern Ireland

When thinking in more detail about the support provided by the UK government and its effectiveness in helping UK armed forces ex-service personnel, uncertainty remains high. Over two-fifths are uncertain about whether support offered to ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system is effective (41%) and a third are unsure of the effectiveness in helping ex-service personnel with addictions (34%). Mental wellbeing has the lowest proportion of the general public being uncertain (23%), but the highest proportion saying government support in this area is not effective (56% net 1/2 responses where 1 is not at all effective). The public are the most positive about the support provided to ex-service personnel with life-changing injuries (15% effective).

A quarter of the UK public do not know if overall government support for ex-service personnel is effective (25%) and 46% do not think it is effective (net 1/2 responses where 1 is not at all effective). The story is similar across the other audience groups – 45% of employers and 48% of healthcare workers do not think overall government support is effective.

Employers are slightly more favourable to the government's support around work – 13% of senior decision-makers think the government's support for ex-service personnel to develop meaningful careers is effective (vs 10% of the public) and 12% think the same for helping ex-service personnel find employment (vs 9% of the public).

There is little variation when comparing healthcare workers to the general public, even when looking at relevant areas. One in ten healthcare professionals think the government's support with ex-service personnel's physical wellbeing is effective (11% vs 10% of the public) and fewer think that support with mental wellbeing is effective (9% vs 7% of the public).

The general public in Scotland is less likely than in the other UK nations to think the government's support on various areas is effective, particularly with financial difficulties (5%), mental wellbeing (5%), housing needs (6%), and finding employment (7%).

Consistent with previous findings, respondents from an ethnic minority are more positive about the government’s support of UK armed forces ex-service personnel than white people. In this case, those from an ethnic minority are more likely to say the government’s support in each area is effective.

Q: How effective or not do you feel the government are at supporting UK armed forces ex-service personnel...

Base: All general public (12,531)

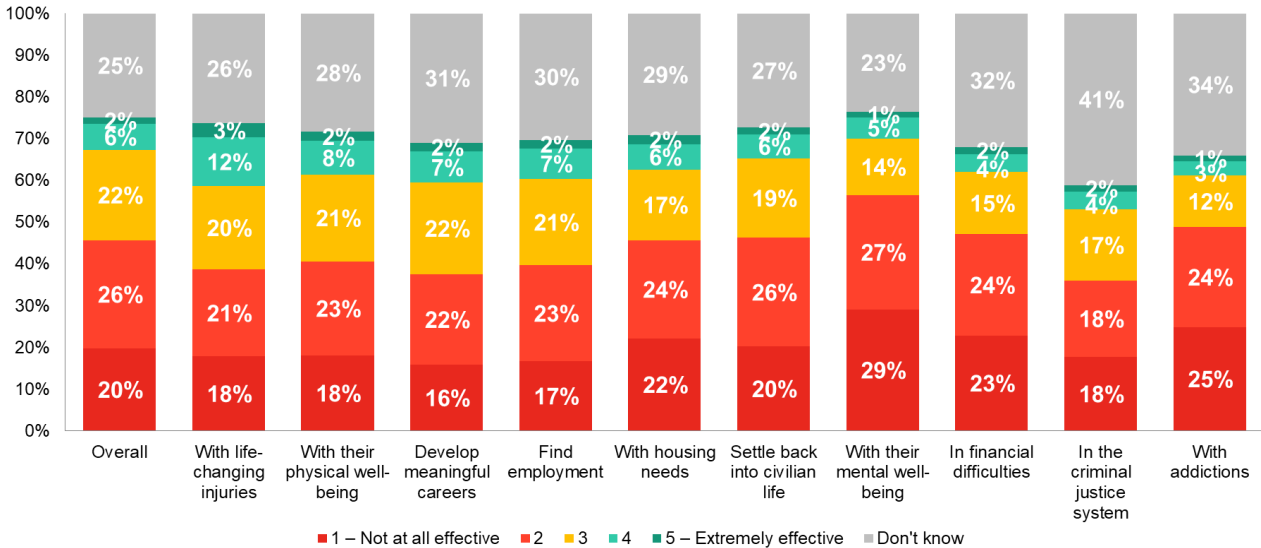


Figure 9. Perceived effectiveness of UK government support for UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Some qualitative participants pointed out that they felt there is increased awareness and resources for mental health problems, with support starting to be more tailored to needs, and more of an understanding of the impacts of warfare.

Generally, participants felt that ex-service personnel are (and should be) treated respectfully, but they should also be treated equally, meaning that they should not receive

‘special’ treatment. Rather, support should be specific to their needs and should be adapted according to the individual and their experiences. Focus group participants think the word ‘special’ should be avoided as this descriptor is problematic, with HR professionals commenting that ex-service personnel should be judged according to their abilities and skills.

“Not special in my opinion, but treatment specific to their needs.”
 – General public, England

“Why should they? [receive special treatment]. Do nurses, firefighters, etc do any less and deserve any less than soldiers.”

– General public, Northern Ireland

“Respectfully but also equally. For example, at a job interview, should be judged on skills and achievements like everyone else.”

– Hiring position

Mental health support was a key area where ex-service personnel were believed to need support, alongside housing and healthcare. With this in mind, qualitative research participants called for holistic care around finances, health and employment from government, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and charities.

“Since they served to protect the country they live in I believe the government should offer them more services. Better health care, better financial help, help in finding work/housing.”

– General public, Scotland

“I think Veterans should automatically have access to a full spectrum of health care services; treatment, rehabilitation, education, counselling, and community support etc.” – HR professional

“I just feel we should have more specified resources. i.e. A veteran mental health facility more focused towards the mental health they may need. Assistance finding a job that will help them adjust to civilian life. It's not special treatment just more specific.”

– Hiring position

Participants believed that they think a holistic and specific reintegration programme would have a positive impact on the rest of society, as ex-service personnel have knowledge and skills which add value both in daily life and in the workplace.

In the qualitative research, ex-service personnel were largely aligned with the public's view. Most do not 'publicise' that they were part of the armed forces in their day-to-day lives, as they do not believe it is necessarily a help or a hindrance. Generally, they would like to see more support and funding around health, particularly mental health, alongside support with housing and reduced tax on their pensions. Some commented

that they are only supported when publicity is needed or when it is ‘politically expedient’.

“I don’t think they should be treated with awe, but there should be some reverence for the service done.” – General public, Wales

Drivers of perception

The results presented in this section are the output of a linear regression model that aims to identify what areas are most closely associated with an overall perception of the government being effective at supporting UK armed forces ex-service personnel. This multivariate analysis provides us with a robust understanding of attitudes by looking at a number of areas at the same time, isolating the effect of each factor after taking into account the simultaneous effects of other factors.

For the purposes of this analysis, the question around perceived effectiveness of support (figure 10) was used with the overall effectiveness taken as the dependent variable and the other areas used as the independent variables. As noted earlier in this chapter, there are high levels of uncertainty around how effective the government is in supporting ex-service personnel. Respondents who selected ‘don’t know’ were excluded from the model but it should be noted that this model is based on the public’s *perception* of effectiveness.

By their relative importance, the main areas that drive the overall perception of effective government support are supporting ex-service personnel to find employment, supporting them with housing needs, and supporting them with financial difficulties. However, these were closely followed by other areas which all had similar levels of importance.

However, mapping each area’s relative importance from the model against the survey data of how effective the government is seen to be at providing that support provides insight into key areas for further development. For example, the government is seen to be comparatively quite effective in supporting ex-service personnel with life changing injuries, but this is the least important area in terms of driving overall perceptions.

The three most important areas driving overall perceptions have fairly middling levels of current effectiveness – less than one in ten think the government’s support is effective

at each (9% finding employment, 8% with housing needs, and only 6% for ex-service personnel in financial difficulties).

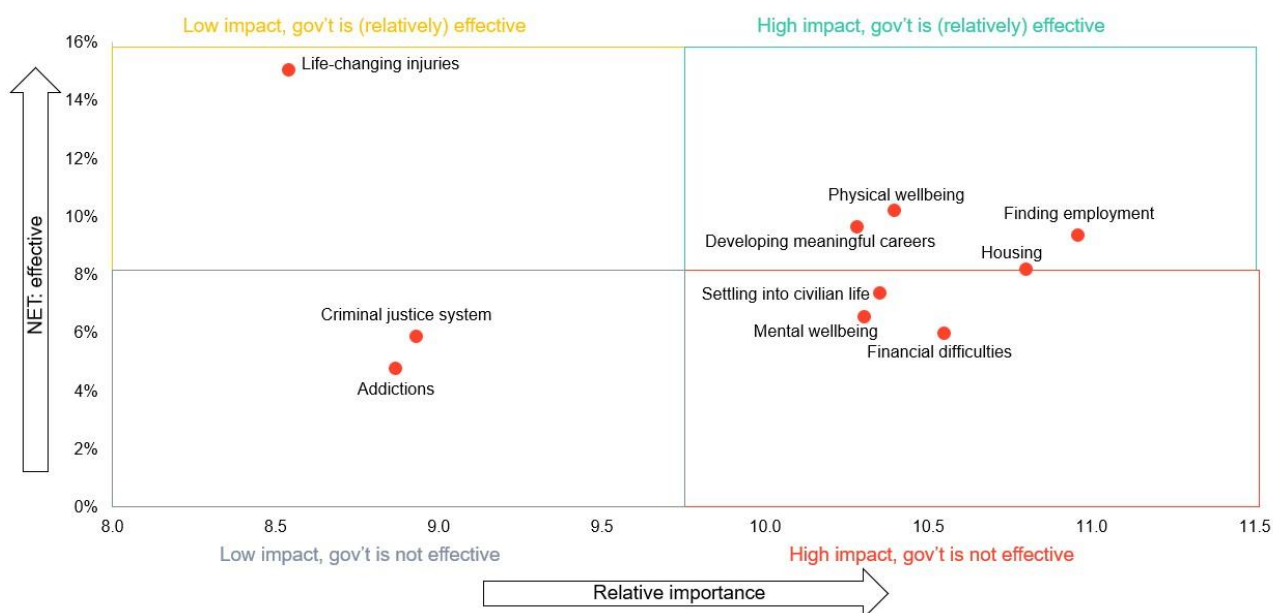


Figure 10. Relative importance for perceived effectiveness of overall government support for UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Charities as drivers of perceptions

From the qualitative conversations with journalists who write on military affairs and ex-service personnel - it became clear the perception is that charities, as part of their campaigning work, may be partly responsible for driving the public perception of ex-service personnel being both irreparably harmed by service and being forgotten about by the authorities.

They felt that these communication strategies may be used by charities to encourage people to donate – doing so in the belief that only the third sector is able to support ex-service personnel who have been marginalised by the military and by the government.

“[Charities] spotlight the things that would generate an emotional reaction in the public in order to give them money to do the work that they wanted to do for the community. I think that just outstrips all of the other stories that would be running in terms of public perception about the non-Mad, Bad and Sad. We make a positive decision to balance Mad, Bad and Sad with normal positive stories about the armed forces communities.”

– Journalist

“There is a very lazy perception that, you know, ‘Oh, there are loads of homeless veterans, and nobody wants to help them, and nobody cares about them, etc.’ Whereas if you speak to the charities, you know, that are working literally on the ground, they will say there are a handful of veterans who are homeless.” – Journalist

Reaction to government support schemes

During the focus groups participants were presented with two different government support schemes and asked for reactions:

- The veterans’ railcard that allows one third off rail fares, as available from 11 November 2020.
- The increase in mental health funding for Afghan ex-service personnel where 51 projects across the UK will receive grants to support young children and their families, including £600k to Samaritans for a new peer support helpline.
- Participants commented that the railcard lacks relevance for those without access to public transport in more rural areas or for those who do not rely on trains. It was also felt to be insufficient – both the public and ex-service personnel wanted to see transport being free for ex-service personnel, rather than discounted. Participants also commented that they would like to see this scheme offered to nurses and other public health workers.

Overall, this initiative was felt to be tokenistic and indicative of ‘gesture politics’, not working to address some of the broader structural issues around ex-service personnel and their reintegration into society e.g., housing and health.

“A good idea but I think practical help in finding employment, how & where to go to sort out all the small things that they won't have had to worry about as well as offering support for the mental transition they have to make would be more helpful.” – General public, Scotland

*“How is that going to help them get a job and integrate with society?”
– General public, Wales*

“Not unless all public sector staff are entitled to the same. Nurses don't even get free parking at the hospitals they work at half the time.”

Not sure why ex-soldiers should get cheaper transport.”

– General public, Northern Ireland

“It’s a start. Now do something about their mental health, their housing needs, their access to the labour market, their homelessness, their physical recovery after injury.” – HR professional

“I think that is a token gesture. Cheap travel does not equate to proper care and support for veterans’ welfare” – Ex-service personnel

On the other hand, the increase in funding for projects focussed on Afghan ex-service personnel was viewed positively as it aimed to address the root issues around reintegration, therefore fulfilling the need for relevant support for ex-service personnel. This relates to stimulus shown regarding bespoke mental health funding for personnel who served in Afghanistan (separate to government support for ex-service personnel provided through the NHS).

However, participants were frustrated to see that this initiative was only aimed towards those who served in Afghanistan – they would like to have seen the support go wider than that. Additionally, they called for more detail on who would offer the support (government, MoD or armed forces budget), as well as what the support would look like, as the £600k budget did not sound adequate.

Finally, participants highlighted the need for mental health support across the population, again commenting that ex-service personnel should not necessarily receive ‘special’ treatment.

“I do think veterans getting better mental health support will help society in general (everyone getting better mental health support will also help society, but I guess it’s a step in the right direction)”

– General public, Wales

“I think this is really good too. Probably feels more appropriate/ relevant than the railcard, but both are fab gestures,” – HR professional

“They use figures which appear big but in the great scheme are not a lot given the number of veterans and how much certain types of support cost.” – Ex-service personnel

Regional highlights

There are a range of opinions across the devolved nations when it comes to evaluating the

UK government's provision of support for ex-service personnel. Those in Wales and Scotland are the most likely to think that the UK government does not look after ex-service personnel. Scotland in particular is less likely to think the government's support is effective across several areas.

Figure 11. Key perceptions around support by nation

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| Net: The UK gov't does not look after UK armed forces ex-service personnel | 45% | 45% | 50% (E,NI) | 49% (E,NI) | 44% |
| Gov't support is effective: financial difficulties | 6% | 6% (S) | 6% | 5% | 6% |
| Gov't support is effective: mental wellbeing | 7% | 7% (S) | 7% (S) | 5% | 6% |
| Gov't support is effective: housing needs | 8% | 8% (S,NI) | 8% | 6% | 6% |
| Gov't support is effective: finding employment | 9% | 10% (S) | 9% | 7% | 7% |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | <i>12,531</i> | <i>8,466</i> | <i>1,270</i> | <i>2,043</i> | <i>752</i> |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Employment

Overall, a majority of our three sample groups would be comfortable working with UK armed forces ex-service personnel. Three-quarters of the working public would feel comfortable working with ex-service personnel and the figure rises for healthcare workers and senior decision-makers within UK employers (figure 12).

Reflecting the generally high levels of comfort, only around one in seven feel there are risks in working with ex-service personnel. The working public are the most likely to hold this view (14%), with employers the least likely to think risks are present (11%).

Across the working public, those in Northern Ireland are significantly less likely than the rest of the UK to feel comfortable with an ex-service personnel colleague (65%) and more likely to feel there are risks. Similarly, UK adults from an ethnic minority are much less likely than white adults to feel comfortable with this (58% vs 76%) and more likely to say there are risks (21% vs 13%). Disabled people are also slightly less comfortable working with ex-service personnel than those without a disability (71% vs 75%) and more likely to say there are risks (18% vs 13%)

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Net strongly agree/agree percentages

Base: General public in work (6,943); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

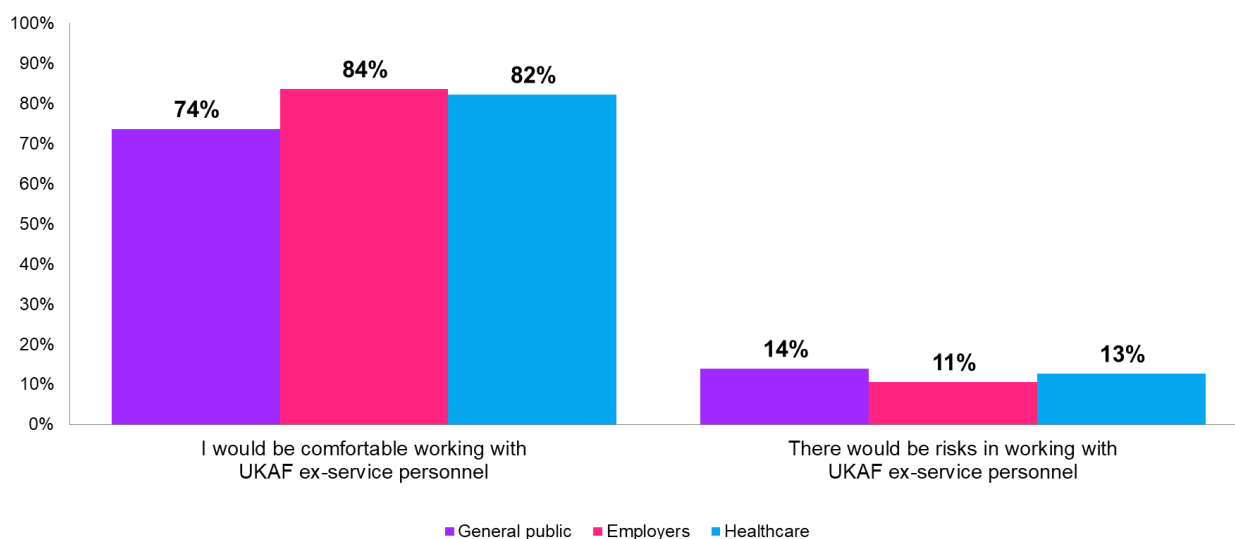


Figure 12. Agreement about working with UK armed forces ex-service personnel

When asked what characteristics UK armed forces ex-service personnel would bring to their workplace, a majority see positive influences like work ethic (62%), resilience (54%), and dedication (53%). UK employers are more likely than the general public to



think ex-service personnel bring positive attributes – particularly trustworthiness, where around half of employers think ex-service personnel are trustworthy (49%), compared to only two-fifths of the working public (40%). Healthcare workers tend to be less optimistic about potential attributes than employers but are more positive than the public.

Within the working public, men are more likely than women to think ex-service personnel would be flexible (24% vs 18%) or trustworthy (41% vs 38%), but they are also more likely to think ex-service personnel will be aggressive (15% vs 12%).

Northern Ireland respondents in particular believe ex-service personnel to be aggressive in the workplace (20%), while both Scottish respondents and Northern Ireland respondents are less likely than the UK average to think ex-service personnel will be dedicated (48%, 46% respectively).

There is a broad upward trend by age, with older workers generally more positive about potential characteristics than younger workers. For example, half of those aged 60 and over think ex-service personnel would be trustworthy, compared to only a third of those aged 18 to 20 (32%). The reverse is seen for the negative attributes – one in ten 18 to 29 year olds think ex-service personnel would be cold (11%), compared to only 5% of those aged 60 and over.

There is a clear divide across ethnicity – members of the working public from an ethnic minority are less likely than white workers to think ex-service personnel bring any positive attribute. They are more likely than white respondents to think ex-service personnel bring the negative attributes listed – particularly aggression (16% vs 13%), coldness (11% vs 7%), and inflexibility (10% vs 7%).

Q: If you were working alongside UK armed forces ex-service personnel, which, if any, of the following characteristics do you think they might bring?

Base: General public in work (6,943); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

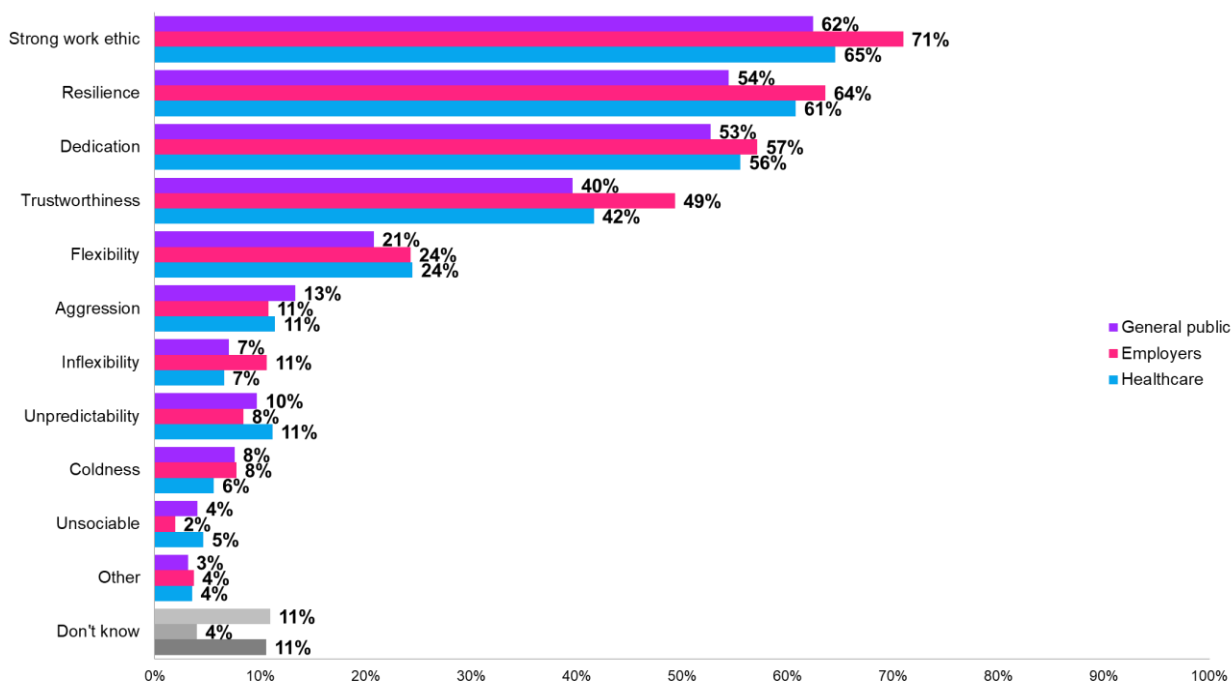


Figure 13. Perceived work characteristics of UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Half or more of the working public think that UK armed forces ex-service personnel would bring effective communication skills (50%), leadership skills (55%), or problem solving skills (61%). Employers are more likely than the public to think that ex-service personnel would bring project management skills to a workplace (41%), while healthcare workers are much more likely than the other two groups to note analytical skills (45%).

Within the general public, men are more likely than women to believe ex-service personnel would be trustworthy (41% vs 38%) or flexible (24% vs 18%). However, men are also more likely to think that ex-service personnel could bring negative characteristics such as aggression (15% vs 12%), coldness (8% vs 7%), and be unsociable (5% vs 3%).

Consistent with the perceptions of characteristics, older workers are generally more likely than younger workers to see valuable skills in working with ex-service personnel. Two thirds of those aged 60 and over think they would bring problem solving skills (66%) while just over half of those aged 18 to 29 would say so (53%). Similarly, those

from an ethnic minority are less likely than white workers to say ex-service personnel bring particular skills.

As elsewhere, Northern Ireland workers tend to be more pessimistic than the rest of the UK – being less likely to say ex-service personnel could bring each skill to a workplace. Scottish workers are also less likely than English or Welsh respondents to think that ex-service personnel would bring leadership skills (51%).

Q: And which, if any, of the following skills do you think they might bring?

Base: General public in work (6,943); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

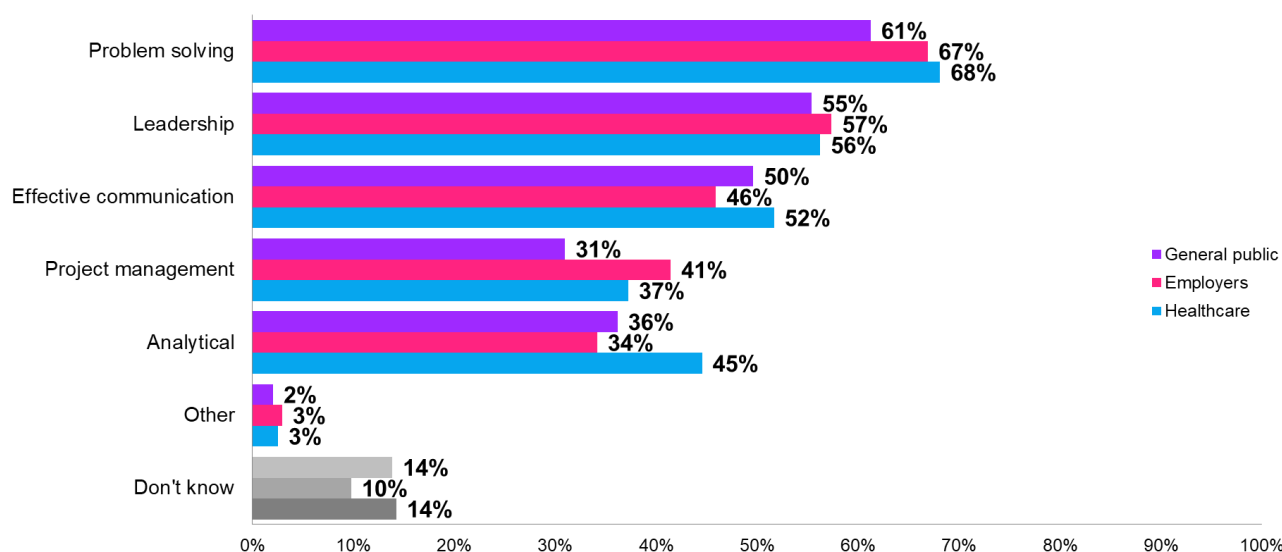


Figure 14. Perceived work skills of UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Across the qualitative discussions there was a generally positive response when asked to consider how ex-service personnel might fit in to the jobs market. This was a view largely based on speculation though some did have direct or indirect experience of ex-service personnel returning to work. Generally, it was felt that military service imbues ex-service personnel with unique but also transferable skills that they can constructively put to use in the jobs market.

These skills are broad and varied and encompass a range of different things such as discipline, and problem solving, as well as patience and resilience. The types of professions mentioned tended to be in the area of security, logistics, and engineering. They do depend on rank and seniority as well; it was pointed out that those in senior positions in the military will be unlikely to transition to jobs where they are required to follow orders. That said, it was made clear by participants that there was no set route – many may take up roles ranging from the technical and skilled to the more manual, from people-facing to more isolated roles.

“Potentially things that have very set rules/regulations where there is less interpretation required. But will depend very much on the individual.”

– General public, Wales

“That will vary a lot - some will actually have learned trades, etc. when serving (chefs, drivers, mechanics, etc.) whilst others won't [have] any easily transferable skills – the attitude can generally be a benefit to any organisations if properly harnessed, though.” – General public, Scotland

Overall, people do think UK armed forces ex-service personnel have the skills and experience to cope with working life – a shared perception held by around half of each of our three groups. A quarter of the general public, employers, and healthcare professionals have mixed views, but only around one in ten do not think ex-service personnel are skilled/ experienced enough.

There is little variation in perceived fitness for working life across the general public demographics – as noted previously, women tend to be more unsure (19% vs 16% men). However, disabled people are more likely than those without a disability to say ex-service personnel do not have the skills/ experience needed (13% vs 9%). Similarly, there is little variation in opinion across employers or healthcare professionals regardless of sector or organisation size.

Q: Please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

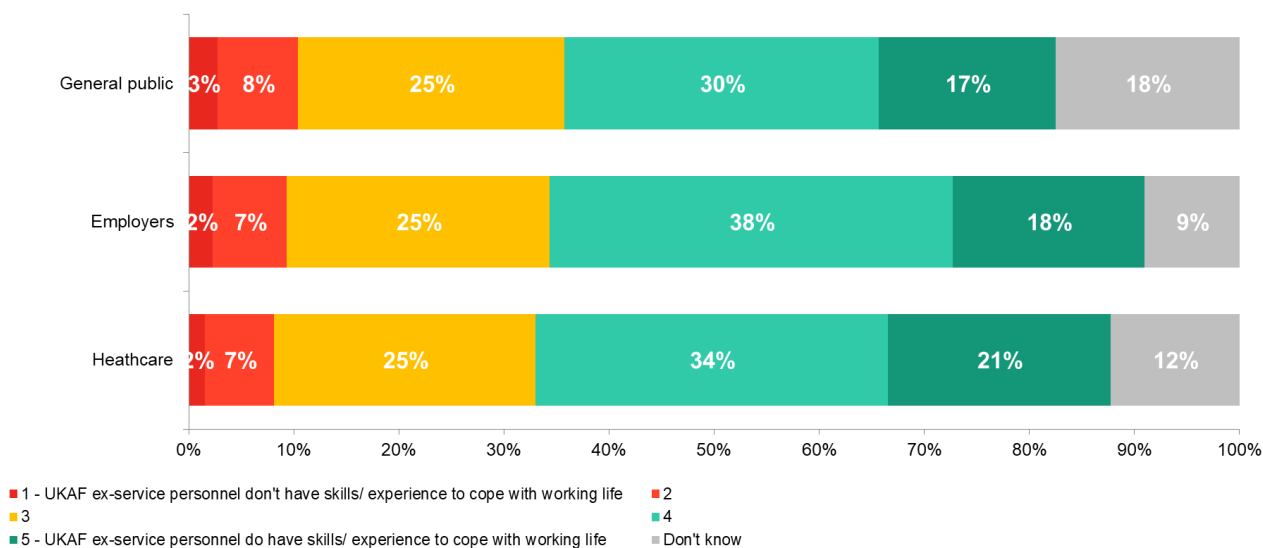


Figure 15. UK armed forces ex-service personnel’s perceived fitness for working life

Despite this perception that UK armed forces ex-service personnel would bring positive attributes, positive skills, and are fit for working life – most think that they would find it more difficult than civilians to find meaningful and fulfilling work outside the military. Only around one in ten of each audience think ex-service personnel would find it easier than civilians to do so.

Within the general public, those from an ethnic minority are more likely than white respondents to think ex-service personnel will find it easier than civilians to get a job outside the military (17% vs 11%). Similarly, those with a disability that limits their day-to-day life are more likely than those without to say this (14% vs 10%).

Looking at employers specifically, senior decision makers in the public sector are much less likely than private sector to think ex-service personnel will find it easy to get employed outside of the military (4% vs 13%).

Q: Do you think UK armed forces ex-service personnel would find it easier or harder than a civilian to find a meaningful and fulfilling job outside the military?

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

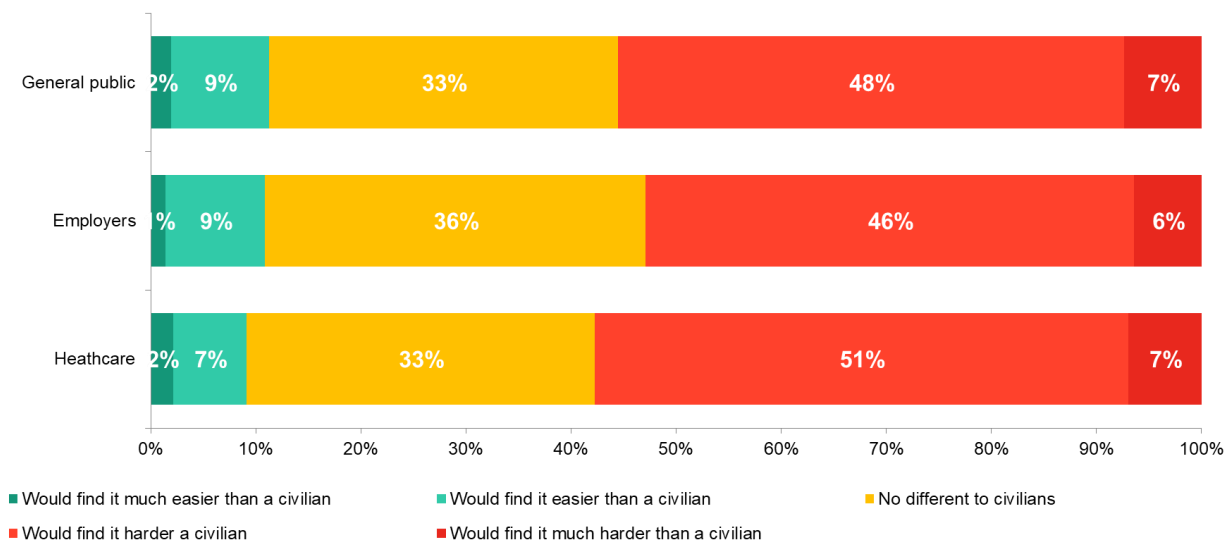


Figure 16. Easier/ harder than civilians to find a meaningful and fulfilling job outside the military

In light of this, it is unsurprising to see that the overwhelming majority of all three audiences think that UK armed forces ex-service personnel need additional support to move into civilian employment – around three-quarters of each audience think so.

For the UK public, there is a clear age trend in perceived need for employment support – only 61% of 18 to 29 year olds think ex-service personnel need this support, rising to 81% of those aged 60 and over. Women are more likely than men to think ex-service personnel need support (74% vs 70%). Those in Northern Ireland are the least likely to think additional support is needed – 6% disagree with the statement, double the rest of the UK nations (each 3%).

Those from an ethnic minority were more likely than white respondents to think that ex-service personnel would find it easier than a civilian to find employment and so it follows that those from an ethnic minority are also less likely to think ex-service personnel need support (61% vs 74%). However, this is not true for disabled people – although they were also more likely than those without a disability to think ex-service personnel can find civilian employment, they are also more likely to say ex-service personnel need additional support to do so (76% vs 71% no disability).

Across employers, those in the voluntary/ third sector are the most likely to think ex-service personnel should have additional support moving into civilian employment

(84%) – more so than private (71%) or public (72%) sector decision makers. This perhaps demonstrates a wider attitude of voluntary/ third sector employers as more favourable towards support, in line with their charitable goals.

Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? UK armed forces ex-service personnel need additional support to move into civilian employment
 Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

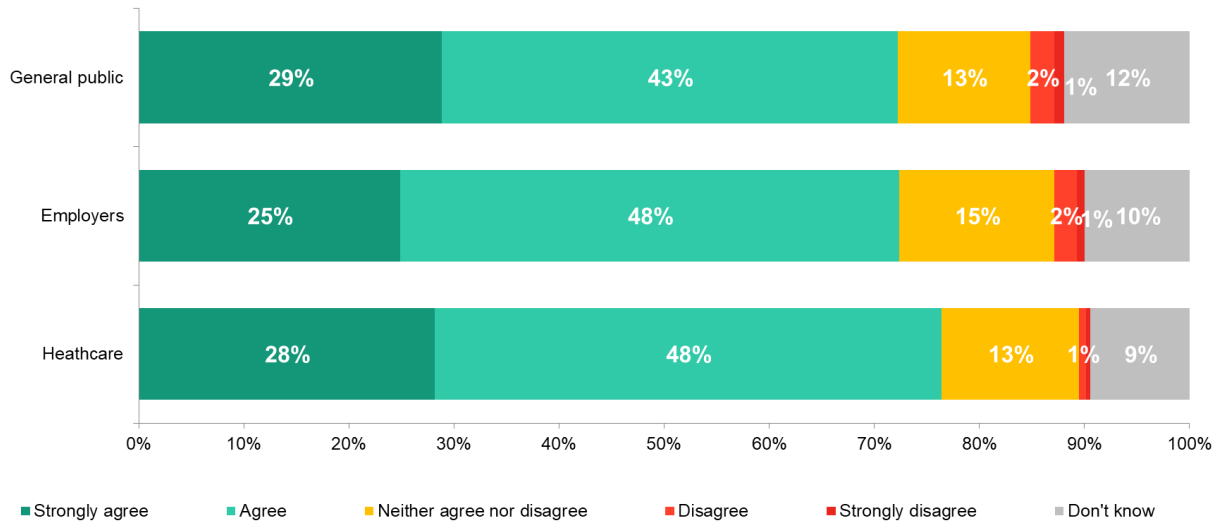


Figure 17. Whether UK armed forces ex-service personnel need civilian employment support

Despite the positive response when considering what skills ex-service personnel bring to the workforce, qualitative participants also identified barriers to employment that may be faced by those leaving the armed forces. As discussed previously, some of these are ‘life skills’ such as navigating the application process. Some concerns also related to ex-service personnel’s interpersonal skills - focus group participants felt that whilst those who had more senior ranks may find it easier to interact in a professional context, more junior ranks may not, and some thought that there may be a deficiency in some of the softer skills. Furthermore, there was a perception of difficulties in adjusting to new working routines; being less reliant on receiving orders in a less hierarchical structure.

“It’s down to the veterans to sell their experience as relevant to the job they’re applying for, which may not be easy. So career help for CV and interviews, and general motivation and guidance on what they could apply for could really help.” – General public, England

“Practical nature, as mentioned before hiring managers don't understand the skillset of veterans. And perhaps veterans don't use the right terminology to demonstrate their skills.”

– General public, England

The qualitative groups also addressed whether or not some of these issues might lead to employers having a bias against hiring ex-service personnel and generally the view was this would not be the case; partly because discrimination is less common nowadays, particularly in a buoyant jobs market, and, moreover, most employers would be able to make use of the skills described above.

Part of the reason that desire for additional support is so high may be that there is very low awareness of the available support asked about in the survey. Although not intended as a comprehensive list of initiatives/ support available, eight in ten of the general public or healthcare workers had not heard of any of the initiatives listed (both 81%). Awareness is slightly better amongst employers, but over two thirds had not heard of any (69%). Awareness is highest for the Armed Forces Covenant, rising to a quarter of employers who had heard of this (25%).

Employers in the public sector are the most likely to have heard of at least one initiative (only 56% had not heard of any). Over a third in the public or voluntary sectors had heard of the Armed Forces Covenant (37%, 36% respectively), compared to only one in five private sector employers (21%). There is generally little variation across employers for their awareness of the National Insurance Contributions holiday or the Great Place to Work for Veterans scheme, although these are both relatively new schemes so low awareness is to be expected.

Q: Which, if any, of the following were you aware of?

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

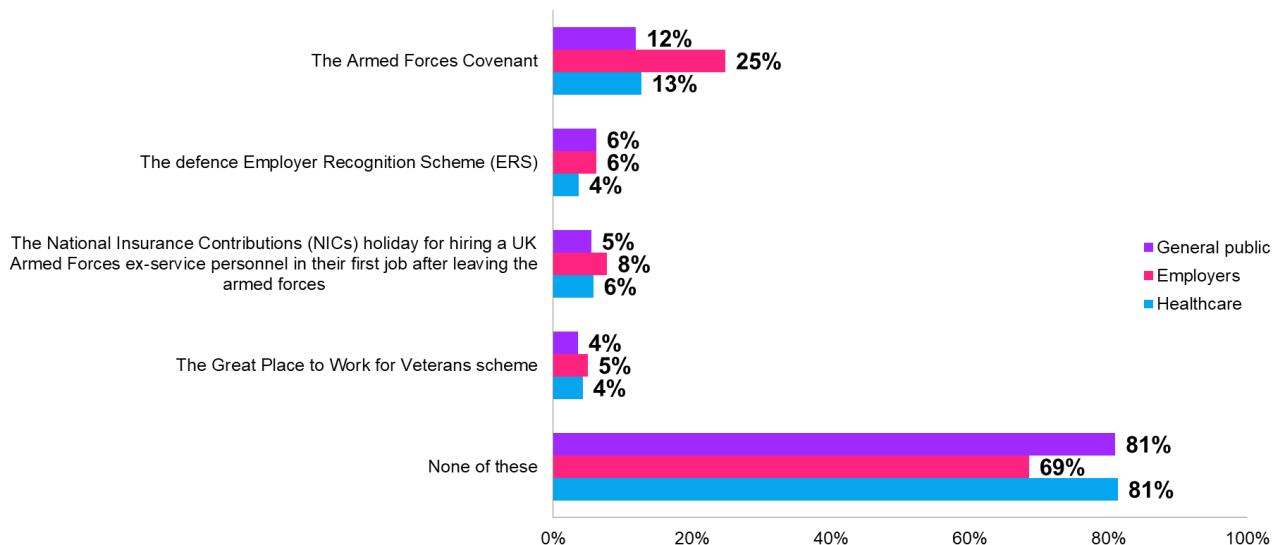


Figure 18. Awareness of employment support

Recruitment and onboarding

Focussing more specifically on employer's recruitment and on-onboarding of UK armed forces ex-service personnel – a third of UK employers say they have employed ex-service personnel (35%), although a similar proportion do not believe they receive any applications from ex-personnel (33%).

Employers in the public sector are the most likely to say they receive applications from (26%) or have employed (49%) ex-service personnel. Over a third of private or third sector organisations claim they do not receive any applications from ex-service personnel (36%, 43% respectively).

A considerable proportion of senior decision-makers within employers do not know if they employ/ receive applications from ex-service personnel (26%). This is likely explained by a lack of data collection – only one in six employers say they collect information on whether staff are ex-service personnel (17%, rising to 26% of public sector). This implies that private and third sector organisations may already employ/ receive applications from ex-service personnel but are not aware of it.

Q: Thinking about recruiting UK armed forces ex-service personnel, which of the following applies to your organisation?

Base: Employers (1,022)

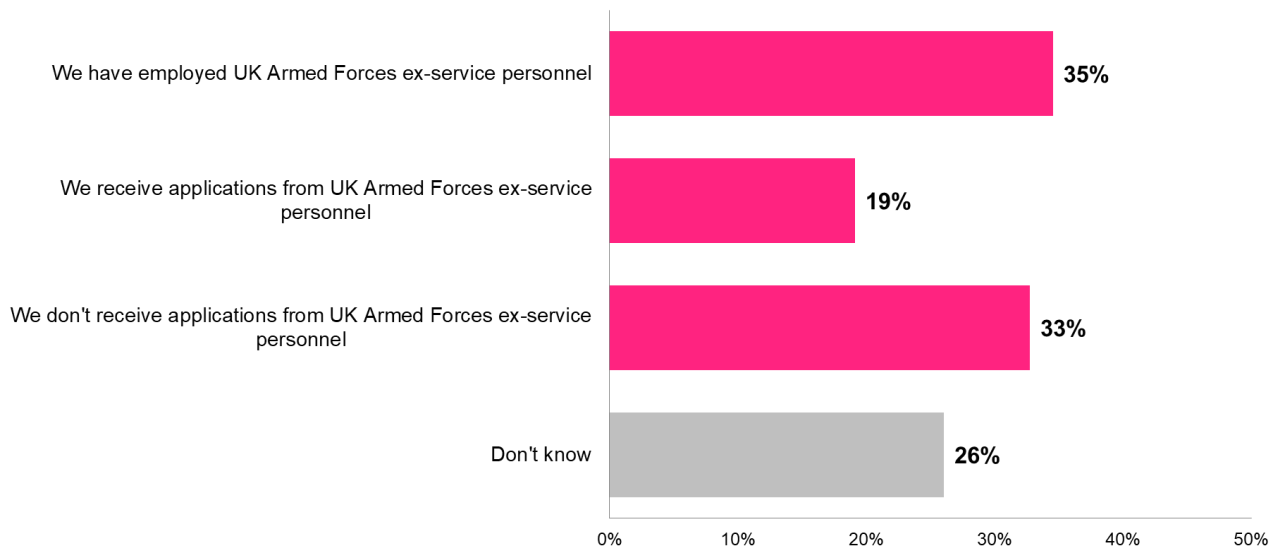


Figure 19. Current employment of UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Despite a majority of employers agreeing that UK armed forces ex-service personnel need additional support to move into civilian employment (figure 18), only a quarter who currently employ ex-service personnel do provide some form of specific support for them (24%).

The perception of need does not vary according to previous experience of ex-service personnel employment – 77% of those who have employed ex-service personnel think they need additional support to move into civilian employment and 74% of those who do not receive applications from ex-service personnel think the same.

Q: Thinking about UK armed forces ex-service personnel who have been employed by your organisation, have you provided any specific support or programmes to help them at the onboarding stage or to further their career?

Base: Employers who employ ex-service personnel (328)

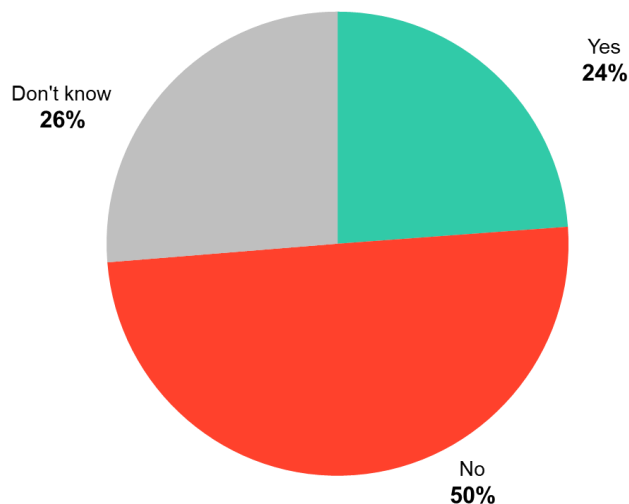


Figure 20. Availability of support for UK armed forces ex-service personnel

A majority of employers would be no more or less likely to hire UK armed forces ex-service personnel over an equally matched candidate. Three in ten say they would prefer to hire the ex-service personnel (30%), while only 4% would be less likely to do so.

Employers in the private sector are the most likely to prefer the ex-service candidate – a third reporting this (32%), compared to only a quarter of public sector employers (27%) and even fewer in the third sector (13%). Three quarters of decision-makers in the third sector indicated they would have no preference between two equally matched candidates (74%).

When asked why they would be less likely to hire ex-service personnel, respondents named some of the characteristics discussed earlier (figure 14) such as inflexibility, aggression, or a lack of relevant skills.

Q: If you were recruiting and had two equally matched candidates, please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: Employers (1,022)

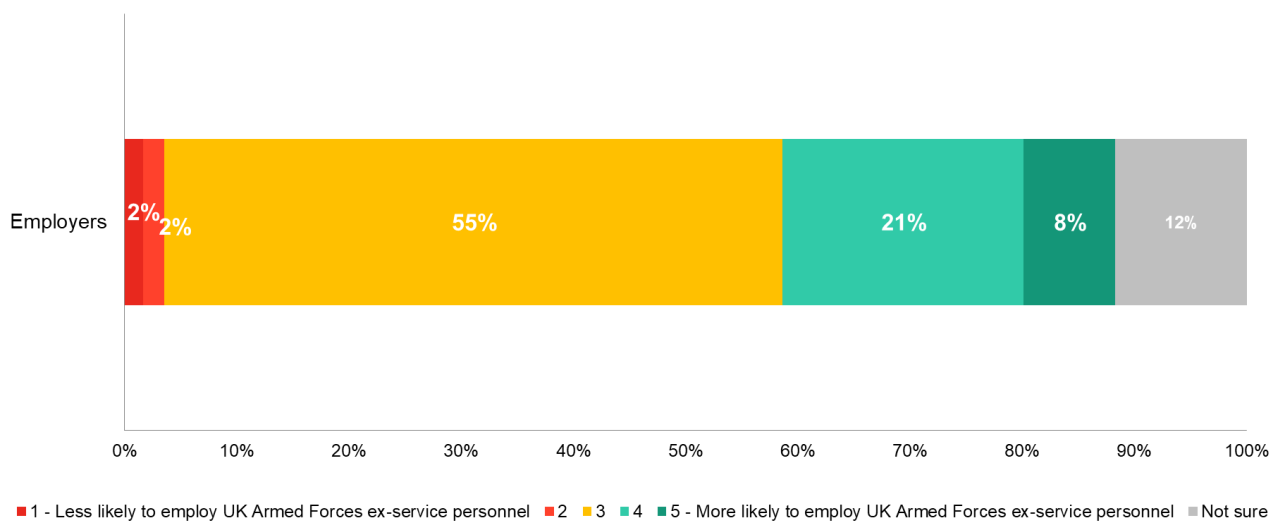


Figure 21. Likelihood to employ UK armed forces ex-service personnel over equally matched candidate

Two-fifths of employers do not have any concerns about employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel (40%). However, a third have concerns about possible mental health issues (34%). This view is also held by the healthcare audience – 33% of healthcare professionals who are senior decision-makers or line managers would be concerned about possible mental health issues. Perceptions around ex-service personnel and mental health issues are discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

The other concerns are only held by one in six or fewer employers and echo the characteristics/ skills mentioned previously – 16% are concerned about social skills or difficulties working with different cultures; echoing that, in figure 14, we saw that some employers think ex-service personnel have poor soft skills such as being ‘aggressive’ (11%), ‘inflexible’ (11%), or ‘cold’ (8%).

Those in the private sector are more concerned than those in the public sector around ex-service personnel’s work skills/ capabilities (15% vs 7%). Employing ex-service personnel appears to put some concerns to rest - those who have already employed ex-service personnel are less concerned than those who have not done so (45% have no concerns vs 38% who do not receive applications).

Q: Which, if any, of the following would concern you about employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel?

Base: Employers (1,022)

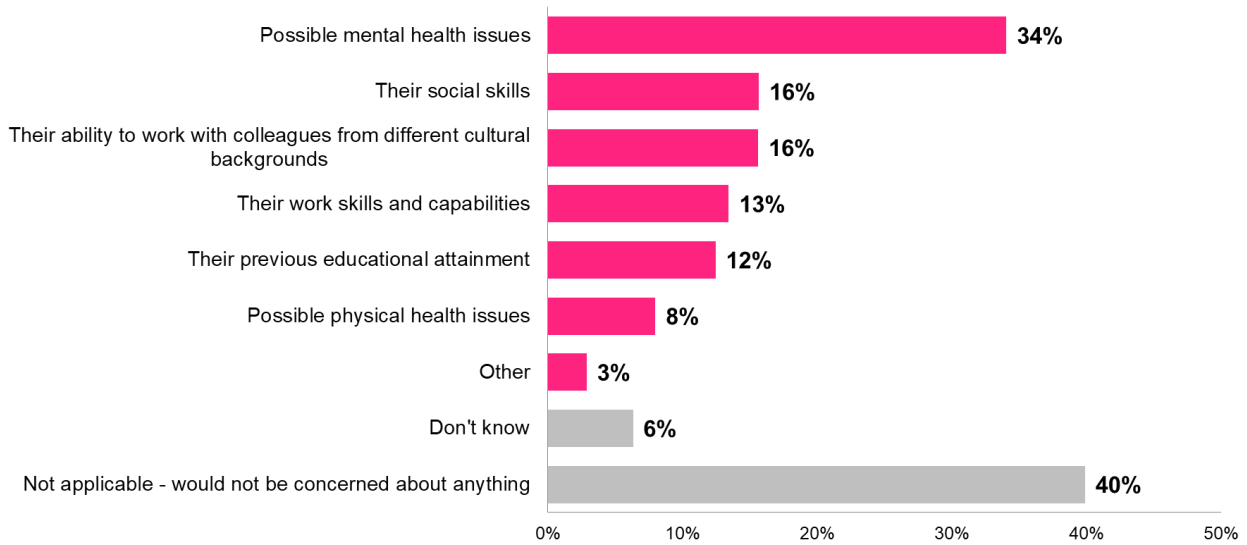


Figure 22. Employer concerns about employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Employers do also see advantages if their organisation employs ex-service personnel – the most common being that they could fill some existing skills gaps (42%). Just under a third of employers would see employing ex-service personnel as a way to demonstrate their social responsibility (32%) or that the personnel would improve the professional skills of their existing employees (31%). Despite social skills being one of the top concerns named, a quarter of employers think ex-service personnel would improve the personal skills of their existing employees (25%).

As might be expected, those who have already employed UK armed forces ex-service personnel are more likely than those who have not to identify benefits to their organisation. Although there was no variation across business size for perceived concerns, small and medium sized employers (SMEs) are less likely than larger employers to identify advantages in employing ex-service personnel.

Employers in the public sector are more interested than the private sector in employing ex-service personnel in order to bring skills into their organisation (53% vs 39%). This remains consistent regardless of whether they have already employed ex-service personnel – public sector organisations who employ ex-service personnel are more likely than private sector businesses who employ ex-service personnel to identify skills gaps as a particular draw (63% vs 51%).

Q: Which, if any, of the following might be advantages to your organisation from employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel?

Base: Employers (1,022)

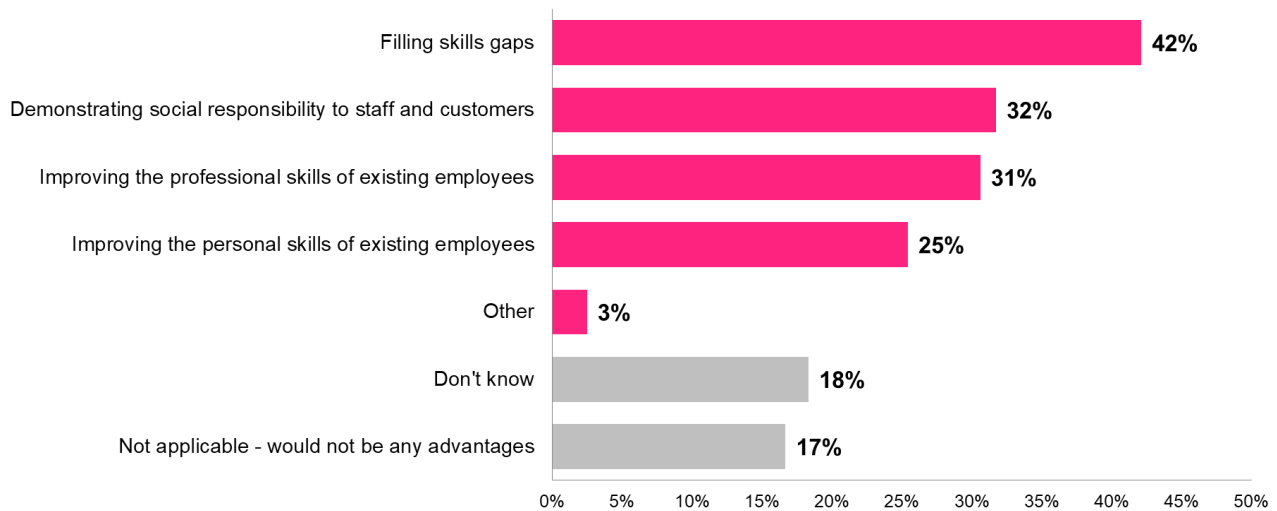


Figure 23. Organisational benefits in employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Three of the groups took place with those in senior and/or hiring positions in their organisation, allowing them to bring their professional experience to the table. Generally ex-service personnel were seen in positive terms – an asset to the workplace. Two particular associations stood out, that they were calm under pressure, and level headed, as well as their patience and loyalty – they valued the organisation that they worked for.

“Qualities I have experienced - brilliant team work, approachable by and to anyone, willing to muck in, turn hand to most things, huge personality, exemplary turn out, neat, organised very well presented, on the ball, knows what's needed and stood out as a military person.

Gave feeling of great trust and sensibility.”

– Hiring position, small business

That said, it was reported that they could often be a little ‘set in their ways’ and prefer to work independently rather than collaboratively, perhaps a reflection of how things are perceived to be in the military. Also, echoing the views of the general public, they felt that they could be supported to be better candidates, particularly at the interview stage.

“We did have some issues with two high level posts...with bullying, aggression....it wouldn't make me not shortlist veterans...but maybe not be quite as doe-eyed at the prospect!” – HR professional

I've worked with some vets and have found them highly disciplined and good at being directed but not so great at managing within a matrix organisation (when people don't report to them directly)

– Hiring position, large business

Positively, the majority of employers would be interested in having/ having *more* UK armed forces ex-service personnel in their organisation (66%). When asked why, many respondents indicated that ex-service personnel would be a potential pool of relevant skills or provide a different background/ perspective that would be beneficial. Some employers noted that their interest would be the same as for any potential candidate who appeared to fulfil the necessary criteria – interest in having them as candidates rather than a preference over civilians (that is discussed in figure 21).

Those who currently receive applications from (81%) or employ ex-service personnel (83%) are more interested in recruiting more than those who do not currently receive any applications (61%). However, the difference comes predominantly from an increase in uncertainty - a fifth of those who do not receive applications from ex-service personnel are unsure about their future interest (20%) compared to only one in ten of those who receive applications (9%) or already employ them (11%). As discussed elsewhere, it appears that familiarity with ex-service personnel as employees provides clarity about the benefits and workplace characteristics.

Q: How interested would you be in employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel/ more UK armed forces ex-service personnel in your organisation?

Base: Employers (1,022)

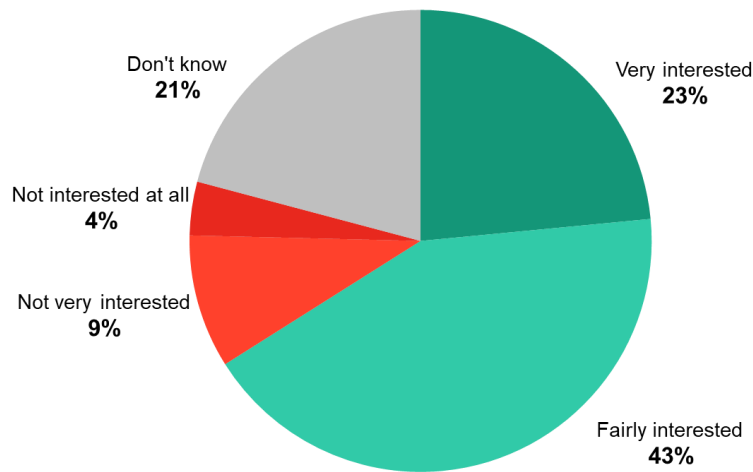


Figure 24. Interest in employing more UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Employers were asked what would be useful for them when thinking about hiring UK armed forces ex-service personnel and all suggestions were broadly welcomed. The most popular was to have tax breaks or financial incentives (30%), and around a quarter selected each of the other items in the list.

As might be expected, those in the third sector are particularly keen to learn more about relevant charities (38% vs 26% private/ 24% public). Large employers are more likely than SMEs to desire most incentives/ information – a quarter of SMEs do not think anything in particular would be useful (26% vs 14%).

Q: Which of the following, if any, would be useful to find out more about employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel? Base: Employers (1,022)

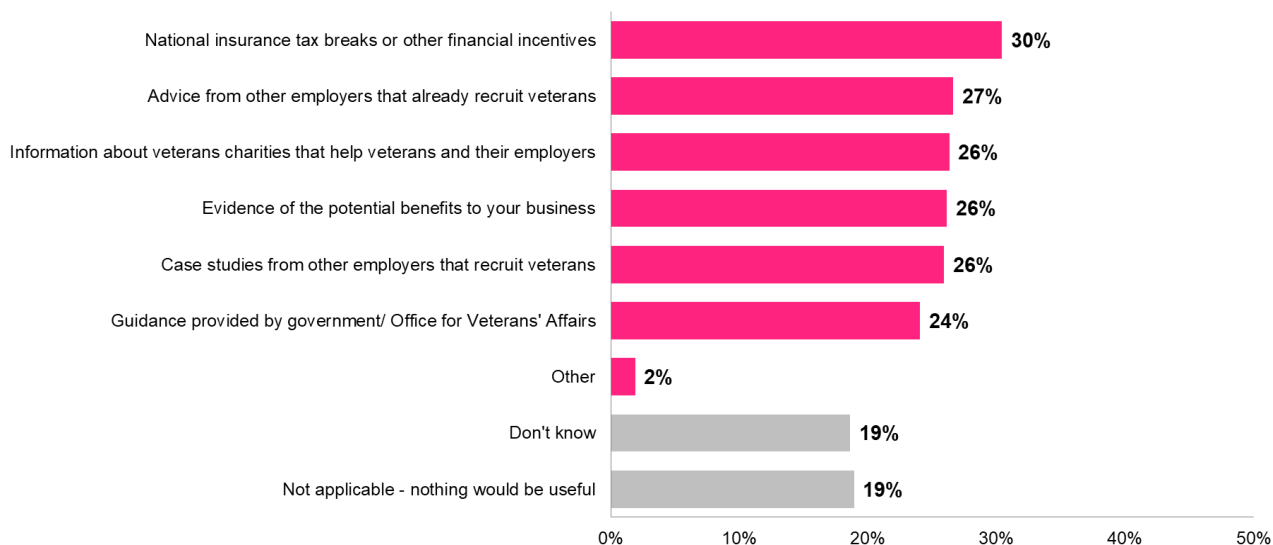


Figure 25. Support for employing UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Qualitative participants were asked about their thoughts on a government initiative to provide National Insurance Relief to employers hiring ex-service personnel, and though there was some support for this there was also a sense that hiring should be done based on merit rather than financial gain. Participants on the whole did not believe that there was a ‘taboo’ attached to ex-service personnel, so did not feel a strong need for an incentive to counter this.

Amongst ex-service personnel themselves there was also a positive experience of returning to the workforce – they had gone into a range of positions including security, police and construction and had not reported any difficulty finding work, though they also said that they count themselves lucky, and are aware that others struggle. They had not heard of either the Great Place to Work initiative nor the National Insurance relief but were supportive of both.

“Too many people have preconceived ideas about what “a veteran” is and their potential limitations. People think that they may be “stuck in their ways” etc and potentially difficult.” – Ex-service personnel

“Employers struggle to understand the skill sets that ex-service people bring. It is easier to go for the “safer” non-military option that they understand.” – Ex-service personnel

Broadly speaking, participants in the focus groups saw ex-service personnel as having great potential, though lacking certain skills, and the perception is that it is up to the MOD to adequately prepare those leaving the Forces, equipping them with the necessary skills to compete in the jobs market, and support their overall transition to achieve their potential.

Regional highlights

Throughout this chapter, we have seen a number of key differences across the devolved nations. In particular, Northern Ireland respondents are less comfortable working with UK armed forces ex-service personnel and feel there are risks in doing so. When it comes to describing the workplace attributes of ex-service personnel, Northern Ireland respondents are less positive than the UK overall.

Figure 26. Key employment perceptions by nation

| | UK Total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|---|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| Agree: I would be comfortable working with UKAF ex-service personnel | 74% (NI) | 74% (NI) | 77% (NI) | 73% (NI) | 63% |
| Agree: There would be risks in working with UKAF ex-service personnel | 14% | 14% | 12% | 15% | 22% (E,W,S) |
| Work characteristic: strong work ethic | 62% | 63% (NI) | 64% (NI) | 60% | 54% |
| Work characteristic: dedication | 53% | 53% (S,NI) | 57% (S,NI) | 48% | 46% |
| Work characteristic: aggression | 13% | 13% | 11% | 14% | 20% (E,W,S) |
| Work skills: problem solving | 61% | 62% (S,NI) | 61% (NI) | 58% | 52% |

| | UK Total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| Work skills: leadership | 55% | 56% (S,NI) | 58% (S,NI) | 51% | 48% |
| Work skills: project management | 31% | 31% (S,NI) | 31%(S,NI) | 29% | 24% |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public in work</i> | 6,943 | 4,821 | 640 | 1,058 | 424 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|---|----------|---------|-------|----------|------------------|
| Disagree: UKAF need additional support to move into civilian employment | 3% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 6% (E,W,S) |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Community and health

The difficulties perceived when UK armed forces personnel move into employment after the military are not confined to just working life – just under half of each audience group think that it is generally difficult for ex-service personnel to adjust to civilian life (figure 28).

Only around one in ten think that it is easy to adjust to life after the military.

Across the general public, those in Wales are more likely than other devolved nations to think that ex-service personnel find the adjustment difficult (50%). Women are more likely than men to think ex-service personnel would find it difficult to adjust to civilian life (48% vs 46%). Interestingly, those who have previous experience of service in the UK armed forces are much more likely to say the adjustment is easy than those who have not served (24% vs 9%).

Consistent with their perspectives around the provision of support, people from ethnic minorities are more likely than white respondents to say ex-service personnel adjust easily to civilian life (16% vs 11%).

Q: Please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

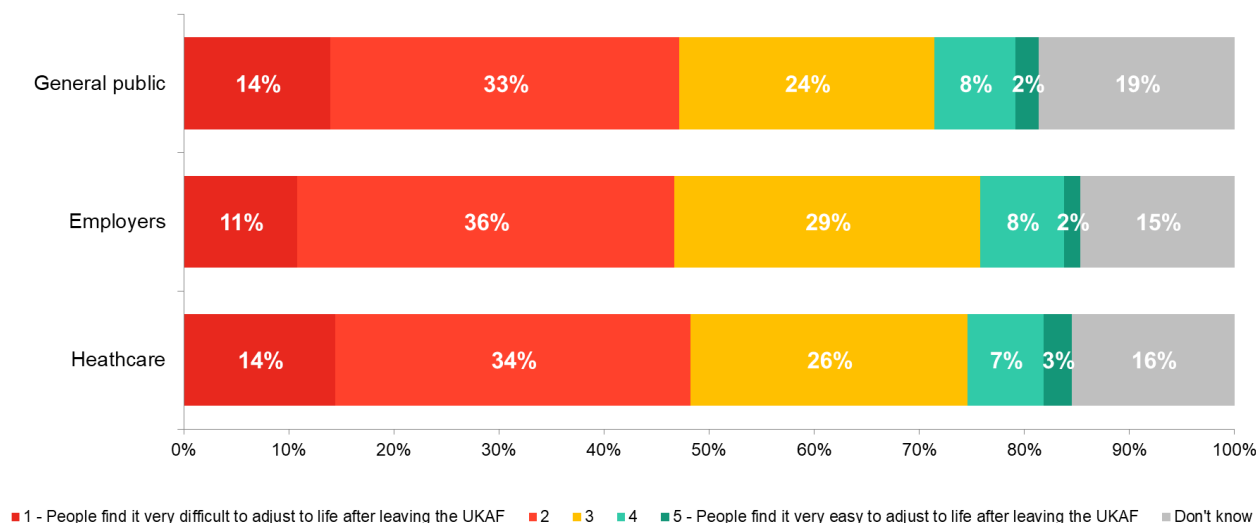


Figure 27. Whether UK armed forces personnel find it easy/ difficult to adjust to civilian life

Society encompasses a variety of areas ex-service personnel may need to adjust to, including healthcare, employment, and housing. The majority think that there is no difference in access to NHS care or family services – the ease/ difficulty of access is

the same as civilians would experience. Perceived difficulty is higher for getting an understanding of the job market; a third think ease of access is consistent with civilians (35%), but two-fifths think it would be more difficult for ex-civilians to do so (40%) – echoing findings earlier in this report in the perception that additional support is needed to support UK armed forces ex-service personnel into civilian employment. Employers perceive these difficulties with almost half (47%) saying that they think ex-service personnel find it harder than civilians to get an understanding of the job market.

People see few barriers preventing ex-service personnel from accessing NHS care or family services; a majority of each audience think ex-service personnel can access these just as well as civilians. Much of the general public believe that ex-service personnel have equal access to access benefits and housing support – not a majority, but more than hold any other perception.

Across the general public, the age trends seen previously continue – women are more likely than men to be unsure while older respondents are more likely than younger respondents to think that it is difficult for ex-service personnel to do each activity. For example, over a third of those aged 60 and over (36%) think it is more difficult for ex-service personnel to find support for housing, compared to only a fifth of those aged 19 to 29 (19%).

In contrast to previous findings, white respondents are more likely than respondents from an ethnic minority to think each activity is more difficult for ex-service personnel. The exception is access to NHS care – people from an ethnic minority are more likely than white people to think this is harder for ex-service personnel (9% vs 6%).

Perception of equal access to NHS services rises to three quarters of healthcare workers (74%) – with NHS workers slightly more positive than private sector healthcare workers (75% vs 71%).

Q: Compared to a civilian, how easy or difficult do you think it is UK armed forces ex-service personnel to do each of the following?

Base: All general public (12,531)

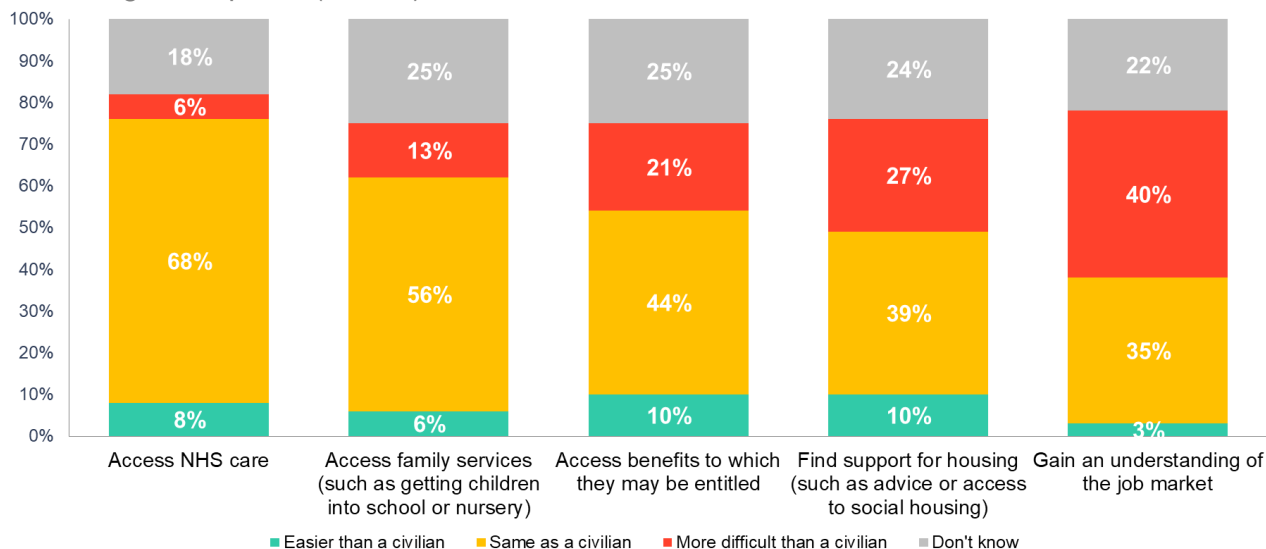


Figure 28. Public’s perception whether UK armed forces ex-service personnel find each activity easier/ harder than civilians

Overall, the perception in the qualitative research was that ex-service personnel *can* struggle to re-integrate into society. This is believed to manifest in different ways – it can be their inability to find work, or somewhere to live, or simply a general reluctance to socialise. Participants felt that many may be less comfortable with ‘navigating the everyday’ – using technology, accessing services, etc., if they have spent a lot of time in service.

“I have a sister in law who had to try and manage the day to day running of her young family as her husband was always away and had no idea how things ran. He completely relied on his wife to carry out general tasks even in going out to buy a car, it was she who had to do these things.” – General public, Wales

Crucially, it was felt that ex-service personnel are reluctant to ask for help, indeed they have been taught to be self-sufficient, therefore they become quite ‘hard to reach’; waiting to be instructed rather than seeking proactive help and assistance.

“The environment encourages you to “shut up & get on with it”, they generally also don't want to show weakness often as that is perceived as letting their mates down. That makes it hard to reach them - most

will only really open up to other veterans & even then reluctantly.”

– General public, Scotland

“I think there's another aspect to combat trauma that's to do with service personnel finding it hard to say they need help as maybe other personnel went through the 'same' or similar without being affected in the same way. it's so difficult for a soldier to say 'I have nightmares and get depressed' because a fundamental part of being a soldier is being strong.” – Healthcare professional

However, there was a marked difference amongst those who knew ex-service personnel personally. Many who had a personal knowledge of ex-service personnel were more likely to claim that they have successfully re-integrated into society, found work, and got on with their lives. This caused some to question the extent to which the ‘mad, bad and sad’ cliché of ex-service personnel was more of a myth perpetuated by the media rather than something that is based in fact.

Amongst the ex-service personnel themselves that we spoke to there was, perhaps predictably, more resilience – most claimed to have found re-integrating fairly easy, but they did feel that there are issues with the public perception of ex-service personnel, in terms of them being unwilling to learn, or difficult to teach them new skills. Often, it was the little things, such as paying bills, that were difficult, but moreover, the lack of schedule and routine was mentioned as a factor making the transition difficult. Despite this, there was a perception that more support is needed, and it needs to go beyond the (very welcome) support made available by the third sector.

“The growth of Help for Heroes came from the need for better physical rehabilitation, it does seem quite crazy that that's being dealt with by charities after they've been broken in their own job....they have to go to Help For Heroes to be able to rehabilitate themselves. I know the OVA has been setup for this purpose, but there's still, I think, quite a drop-off from when people come out and transition, and then the MOD sort of say, 'Oh, you're not our responsibility anymore, thanks, off you go.' Potentially that will improve as the Office for Veterans' Affairs improves. I think they're still, sort of, very much finding their feet, which is completely understandable” – Journalist

“There are a lot of charities just waiting to help people and find it very frustrating that people either do not come to them or that they ask for help much later than they should. The armed forces have a ridiculous number of charities and then there are charities linked to professions - such as caterers, engineers etc. Many are under used (I speak from experience from a charity with more money than we could spend).”

– Ex-service personnel

Recognising ex-service personnel’s contributions

People are split about whether UK society values ex-service personnel – around three in ten think it does, while the same proportion think it does not, or sit in the middle.

Uncertainty is higher for the general public and healthcare workers, but even amongst employers, there is a fairly even mix of views.

The patterns seen within the general public echo those discussed earlier in this report. Women tend to be more unsure, while older respondents have tended to be more pessimistic about what support is provided and think ex-service personnel are in need of more support. Here, perceptions that society does not value UK armed forces ex-service personnel rise with age – over a third of those aged 60 and above think ex-service personnel are not valued (35%) compared to only a fifth of those aged 18 to 29 (21%).

Similarly, respondents from an ethnic minority have tended to think UK armed forces ex-service personnel are looked after and not in need of support. People from ethnic minorities are more likely than white respondents to think UK society does value ex-service personnel (32% vs 27%).

Across region, those in Scotland and Northern Ireland are least likely to think society values ex-service personnel (both 24%).

Q: Please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

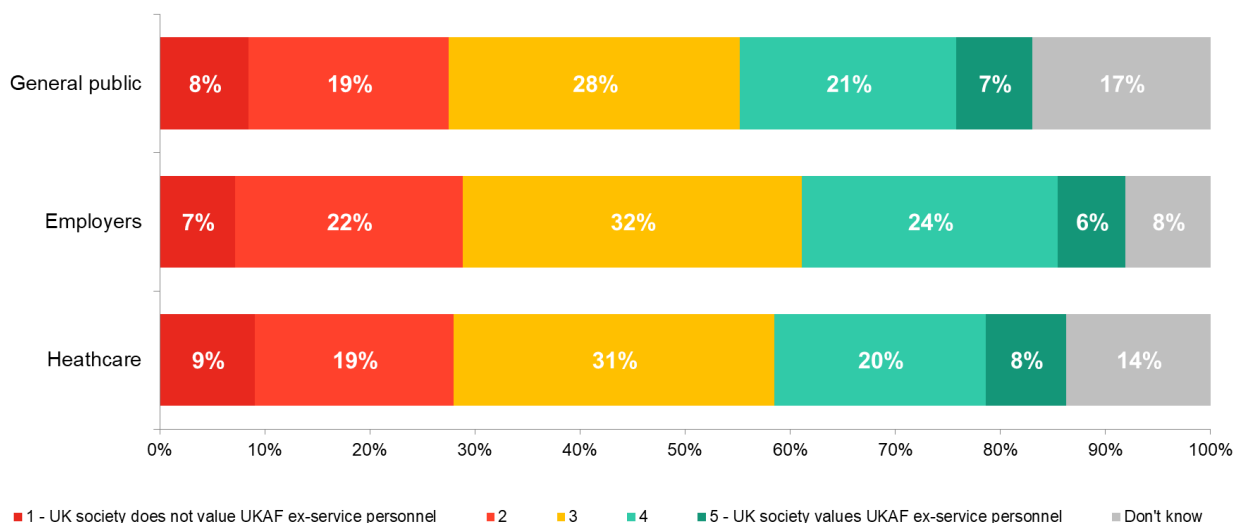


Figure 29. Whether UK society values UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Despite a mix of opinions around society valuing ex-service personnel, it is clear that a majority think ex-service personnel do make valuable contributions to society. Over half of all three groups think as much, rising to two-thirds of employers (66%).

Across the general public, those in Northern Ireland are the least likely to think that ex-service personnel make contributions to society. Although they think society values ex-service personnel, people from ethnic minorities are less likely than white respondents to think ex-service personnel contribute to society (49% vs 59%).

Those with previous experience of service in the UK armed forces are much more likely than those without to say that ex-service personnel make valuable contributions to society (70% vs 57%). The personal experience seems key – there is no difference between those with a close friend/ family member in the UK armed forces and those without.

Q: Please select the point on the scale that most closely matches your opinion.

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)



Figure 30. Whether UK armed forces ex-service personnel contribute to society

In discussing how ex-service personnel are treated by others, qualitative participants firstly thought of the broader societal treatment. Generally, they felt that society *does* treat ex-service personnel well, that they are looked upon with respect and treated sympathetically by the public.

Indeed, the more generative discussion was how ex-service personnel are treated by ‘the system’, which was a combination of how they are treated by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), acting on behalf of the government, and provided with ongoing support from the statutory sector. It was generally felt that the deficit lies with this ‘system’, who do not provide ex-service personnel with ongoing support after they have left service, though some simply framed this as ‘the army’ as a catch all term for all the services.

“The government doesn't know how to or prioritise mental health for non-veterans. So I don't think they can even begin to understand how to support ex-military.” – General public, UK

Participants said that those leaving the armed forces should be supported holistically, with timely and early interventions whilst still serving, to support a smooth transition back to civilian life. As those leaving the armed forces do not actively reach out for help or would not know how to navigate the services available in society; many therefore stressed that support should be proactive.

It was felt that support should be led by the armed forces themselves; participants were aware that charities do offer support but when support is led by charities it can add to a sense that ex-service personnel are being forgotten about and cast adrift. Some participants believed that the support system for ex-service personnel is much stronger in the USA, both in terms of formal and informal provision.

“The States have official veterans associations, but I've never seen anything like that here apart from one hospital somewhere in the Midlands I think.” – General public, UK

Health conditions and healthcare

Over two thirds of each audience think UK armed forces ex-service personnel experience mental health conditions more than civilians. This remains high amongst healthcare professionals (68% public, 67% employers, 70% healthcare). Private sector healthcare workers are slightly more likely than NHS workers to think ex-service personnel experience higher rates of mental health issues (73% vs 69%). As stated in an earlier chapter, there was the perception amongst military journalists that charities may overinflate the prevalence of ex-service personnel in crisis by focusing on the worst case scenarios which may inform these views in the general public.

Around half think that ex-service personnel are affected more than civilians by physical health problems (47% public, 41% employers, 48% healthcare)². Here, NHS workers are more likely than private sector workers to think ex-service personnel experience high rates of physical health problems (49% vs 46%).

Within the general public, women are more likely than men to think ex-service personnel experience health problems more than civilians. Half of women think ex-service personnel experience more physical health problems (50% vs 44% men) and seven in ten think they experience more mental health problems (70% vs 67%).

5% of the general public think that ex-service personnel experience unemployment less than civilians and around two-fifths think that they experience about the same level

² One in 10 (10.5%) UK Armed Forces personnel were seen in military healthcare for a mental health related reason in 2020/21 (Source: DMICP, In-patient service provider and BFG). In comparison, one in six (17%) adults surveyed in England had a common mental health disorder in 2014 (Source: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey).

(37%). A similar proportion think that ex-service personnel experience unemployment at higher rates than civilians (38%). Employers have a similar perspective – 5% think ex-service personnel are affected by unemployment less than civilians, 40% think it is about the same, and 37% think they face higher levels of unemployment.

Across the general public, white people are generally more likely than those from ethnic minorities to think ex-service personnel are affected by each issue. There are a range of perspectives by age – younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to think that ex-service personnel are affected by physical health problems (54% 18 to 29 vs 43% 60+), addictions (46% vs 38%), and committing crime (14% vs 9%). Older respondents are more likely than younger groups to think ex-service personnel are affected by mental health problems (71% 60+ vs 64% 18 to 29) and homelessness (45% vs 52%).

Q: Do you think that each of the following affects UK armed forces ex-service personnel more, less or about the same as civilians?

Base: All general public (12,531)

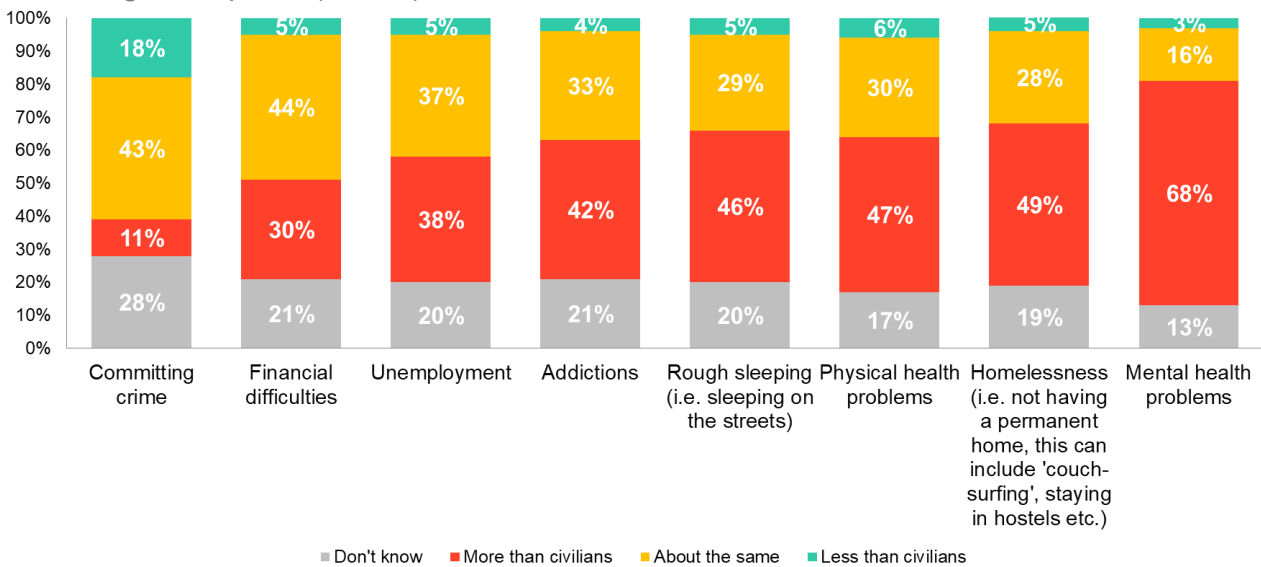


Figure 31. Public perceptions whether UK armed forces ex-service personnel are more/ less affected by each issue than civilians.

Looking further into perceptions around mental health, roughly eight in ten associate Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/ combat stress with ex-service personnel. Around half or more of the general public associate ex-service personnel with depression (60%), panic attacks (52%), anger management issues (50%), or general anxiety (47%). Interestingly, employers are less likely to associate each mental health

condition with ex-service personnel while healthcare workers were broadly on par with the general public.

Private sector healthcare staff are more likely than NHS workers to associate ex-service personnel with depression (67% vs 57%), anger management (58% vs 46%), and OCD (23% vs 16%). Patient facing staff are more likely to associate conditions with ex-service personnel than non-patient facing staff – only 3% said they would not associate any condition with them compared to 7% of non-patient facing staff.

Just as they were more likely to think ex-service personnel are affected by mental health issues, older respondents are more likely to associate a range of health conditions with ex-service personnel. Those aged 60 and over are more likely than those under 30 to think UK armed forces ex-services personnel experience PTSD (86% 60+ vs 73% 18 to 29), depression (66% vs 54%) and anger management issues (56% vs 43%). Women are more likely than men to associate each mental health condition with ex-service personnel.

Across the nations, England is the least likely to associate anger management issues with ex-service personnel – only 49%, compared to over half of the devolved nations (54% Wales, 53% Scotland, 55% Northern Ireland).

White respondents tend to be more likely than adults from an ethnic minority to associate each mental health condition with ex-service personnel, with the exception of bipolar disorder (10% white, 16% ethnic minorities) and eating disorders (5% vs 9%).

Associating mental health conditions with ex-service personnel appears fairly static over time. The question was previously asked in 2018 and the most common association was PTSD (83%). Depression and anger management issues also see relatively similar scores to 2018 (62%, 50% respectively), although there appears to have been a rise associating panic attacks with ex-service personnel (45% 2018, 52% 2022).

Q: Which, if any, of the following mental health conditions do you associate with UK armed forces ex-service personnel?

Base: General public (12,531); Employers (1,022); Healthcare (549)

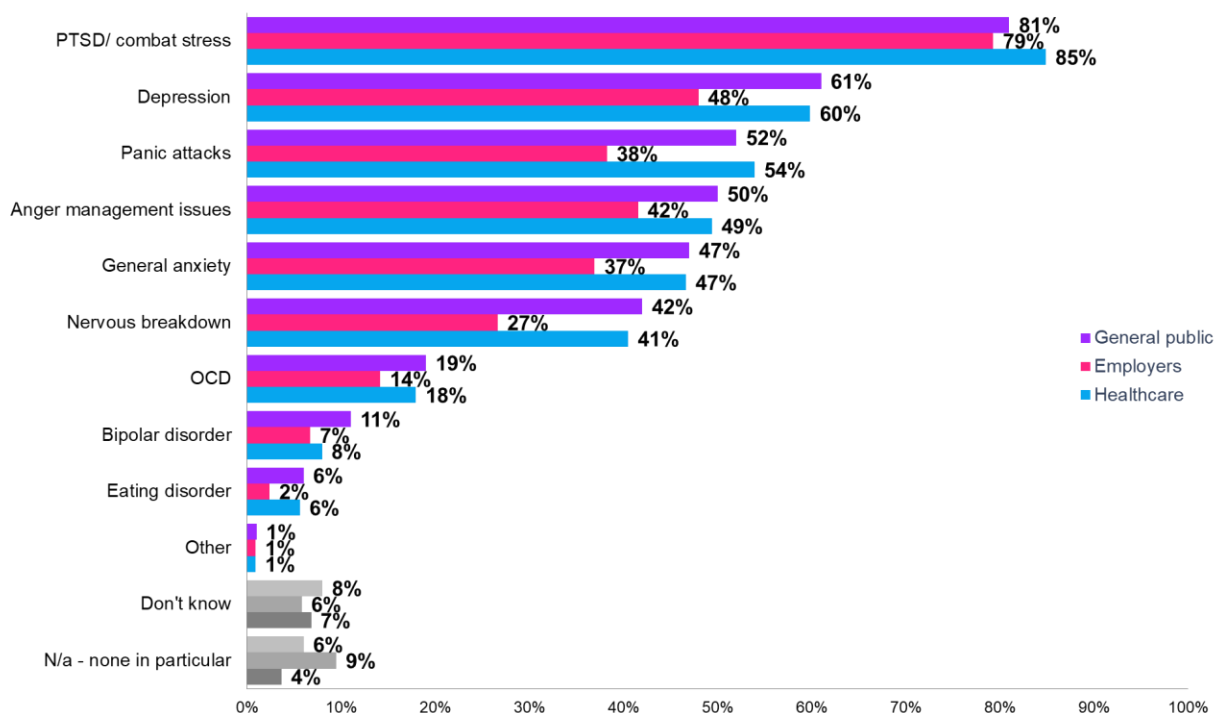


Figure 32. What mental health conditions are associated with UK armed forces ex-service personnel

Through all the focus groups the consensus was a perception that ex-service personnel bring a huge amount of mental health problems with them when they return from active service. Interestingly, participants often framed this as ‘PTSD’ rather than a wider concern about mental health issues.

“It’s hard to settle back into a life when you haven’t been a part of it for a while. Depression can hit when you find out all that you’ve missed while away. I think it may be more difficult the longer you’ve been away.” – General public, Northern Ireland

However it was still clear that people believe active service has a detrimental effect on the mental health of ex-service personnel who have returned from service. For many, there is a perception that ex-service personnel are ill-prepared for their return to society and there is a sudden and jarring ‘jolt’ back into civilian life, rather than a transition. It is this perceived lack of transitional support which was felt to exacerbate the mental health problems that many ex-service personnel face, which is made worse by the

institutional nature of the armed forces. The loss of the military 'community' is perceived to be particularly damaging and difficult.

"From experience, having to move from one country to another even as civilians is already quite difficult, imagine this would be even more so for veterans, even if they are returning to where they were before.

It could even be more difficult as reintegrating to your old place is more difficult than integrating to a new place. There's the reverse culture shock and all. They may have more expectations"

– General public, England

Participants believed that one of the knock-on effects of this is substance abuse as a way to numb the anguish, though it was also believed by many that there is a drinking culture in the forces that lends itself to excessive alcohol intake. That said, none had personal experience of this through anyone that they knew, and some did believe that this was more of a cultural trope than something grounded in fact.

In discussing this issue with healthcare professionals, those that had exposure to ex-service personnel painted quite a stark picture of the effects of mental health, though it should be noted that this is a view coloured by their professional experiences. They had seen ex-service personnel with profound emotional problems and who were often aggressive, isolated, and suicidal. They felt that much more needs to be done, through dedicated services, mental health referrals and links to specific networks. In addition to this, the healthcare professionals that we spoke to were not aware of current NHS services such as Op COURAGE. Having ex-service personnel champions, for example, was felt to be a good way of driving change and raising awareness, as well as more informal networks.

"I do think one of the best things that would help veterans is to invite veterans to support each other - maybe older leavers to pair up with those just leaving - would need training though, like a more informal

version of SSAFA" – Healthcare professional

Regional highlights

Across perceptions of community and health, we see similar patterns within the devolved nations as outlined in previous chapters. Those in Scotland and Northern Ireland are less likely than the other nations to think UK society values ex-service personnel. Those in Northern Ireland are also the least likely to think ex-service personnel contribute to society.

Figure 33. Key perceptions around society and health across the general public in devolved nations

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| UKAF ex-service personnel find it difficult to adjust to civilian life | 47% | 47% | 50% (E) | 48% | 48% |
| UK society values UKAF ex-service personnel | 28% | 28% (S,NI) | 28% (S,NI) | 24% | 24% |
| UKAF ex-service personnel make a valuable contribution to society | 58% | 58% (NI) | 60% (NI) | 59% (NI) | 51% |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Conclusions

This research has explored a range of audiences' perspectives around UK Armed Forces ex-service personnel, from the general public and employers, to journalists and ex-service personnel themselves. This provides a comprehensive view of ex-service personnel, both of their status within society and attitudes around their employability.

One of the key findings is that the general public believe ex-service personnel do not receive enough recognition from the government and many also think the government is not effective in the support it does provide. However, it is worth noting that when drilling down into specific areas of support – uncertainty is high. People may not be familiar with what support is available or what work is being done to help ex-service personnel transition into civilian life.

When thinking about employment in particular, many think ex-service personnel would bring benefits to their workplace and recognise that there may be difficulties transitioning to civilian employment. Ex-service personnel are seen as having valuable characteristics and the skills necessary to cope with working life. However, most think that they need additional support to move into civilian employment and many employers of ex-service personnel do not offer such support.

There was a feeling that ex-service personnel may struggle to reintegrate into civilian society. People particularly associate ex-service personnel with homelessness and mental health issues. Healthcare staff are just as likely as the wider public to think ex-service personnel experience high rates of mental health issues and specific mental health issues like PTSD.

There is a thread of opinion amongst people from an ethnic minority. They tend to think the government *is* providing effective support and that ex-service personnel can easily transition into civilian life. Given that those from an ethnic minority think ex-service personnel are already looked after, they are more likely than white respondents to think that society values ex-service personnel and they are not in need of support. Despite this, those from an ethnic minority are less likely than white respondents to think ex-service personnel actually contribute to society.

Perceptions also vary notably across the UK, with those living in England tending to be more positive than devolved nations. Respondents in Wales are the most likely to think



ex-service personnel find it difficult to adjust to civilian society. Both Scottish and Northern Ireland respondents are less likely than the other UK nations to think that ex-service personnel contribute to society.

However, on the whole, people do think that UK Armed Forces ex-service personnel make valuable contributions to society. The qualitative research indicates that there is a public perception of damaged veterans, but it is a 'flimsy' perception, in that those who feel this way are unable to pinpoint specific details of what underpins it. Much of it is based on anecdotal recollections, lazy portrayals in the media, or charities looking to maximise donations; those who have the most experience of dealing or working with veterans are those who are most likely to tell a much more positive story of veteran reintegration.

However, the qualitative research also highlights large perceived unmet needs for ongoing support for veterans amid the public perception that they are 'left out to dry' - with the burden of responsibility falling largely on the shoulders of the organisations that are perceived to be responsible in the first place; the government and the MOD. All this indicates an important role for the OVA, wider government, and the charity sector in terms of countering public (mis)perceptions of damaged veterans (and countering inaccurate stereotypes created by those who are seeking to drive attention to a cause).

Appendix A: regional highlights

Overall perceptions

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| Gov't is effective at supporting UKAF ex-service personnel | 15% | 15% (S) | 13% | 13% | 16% |
| Gov't is ineffective at supporting UKAF ex-service personnel | 43% | 43% | 49% (E,NI) | 46% | 43% |
| UKAF portrayed in media: positively | 39% | 40% (S,NI) | 40% | 36% | 35% |
| UKAF portrayed in media: negatively | 20% | 20% | 20% | 22% (E) | 25% (E,W) |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Provision of support

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|---------|------------|------------|------------------|
| Net: The UK gov't does not look after UK armed forces ex-service personnel | 45% | 45% | 50% (E,NI) | 49% (E,NI) | 44% |
| Gov't support is effective: financial difficulties | 6% | 6% (S) | 6% | 5% | 6% |

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|-----------|--------|----------|------------------|
| Gov't support is effective: mental wellbeing | 7% | 7% (S) | 7% (S) | 5% | 6% |
| Gov't support is effective: housing needs | 8% | 8% (S,NI) | 8% | 6% | 6% |
| Gov't support is effective: finding employment | 9% | 10% (S) | 9% | 7% | 7% |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Employment

| | UK Total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|---|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| Agree: I would be comfortable working with UKAF ex-service personnel | 74% (NI) | 74% (NI) | 77% (NI) | 73% (NI) | 63% |
| Agree: There would be risks in working with UKAF ex-service personnel | 14% | 14% | 12% | 15% | 22% (E,W,S) |
| Work characteristic: strong work ethic | 62% | 63% (NI) | 64% (NI) | 60% | 54% |
| Work characteristic: dedication | 53% | 53% (S,NI) | 57% (S,NI) | 48% | 46% |
| Work characteristic: aggression | 13% | 13% | 11% | 14% | 20% (E,W,S) |
| Work skills: problem solving | 61% | 62% (S,NI) | 61% (NI) | 58% | 52% |
| Work skills: leadership | 55% | 56% (S,NI) | 58% (S,NI) | 51% | 48% |
| Work skills: project management | 31% | 31% (S,NI) | 31% (S,NI) | 29% | 24% |

| | UK Total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|---------|-------|----------|------------------|
| <i>Unweighted base: general public in work</i> | 6,943 | 4,821 | 640 | 1,058 | 424 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|---|----------|---------|-------|----------|------------------|
| Disagree: UKAF need additional support to move into civilian employment | 3% | 3% | 3% | 3% | 6% (E,W,S) |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Community and health

| | UK total | England | Wales | Scotland | Northern Ireland |
|--|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------------|
| UKAF ex-service personnel find it difficult to adjust to civilian life | 47% | 47% | 50% (E) | 48% | 48% |
| UK society values UKAF ex-service personnel | 28% | 28% (S,NI) | 28% (S,NI) | 24% | 24% |
| UKAF ex-service personnel make a valuable contribution to society | 58% | 58% (NI) | 60% (NI) | 59% (NI) | 51% |
| <i>Unweighted base: general public</i> | 12,531 | 8,466 | 1,270 | 2,043 | 752 |

Letters after the figure denote significant differences against that country (E=England/ W=Wales/ S=Scotland/ NI=Northern Ireland)

Appendix B: Composition of the online surveys

UK public

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Total | | 12531 | 12531 | 100% |
| Age | 18 to 29 | 2422 | 2346 | 19% |
| | 30 to 39 | 2181 | 2234 | 18% |
| | 40 to 49 | 2087 | 2129 | 17% |
| | 50 to 59 | 2100 | 1933 | 15% |
| | 60+ | 3741 | 3890 | 31% |
| Gender | Male | 5935 | 6080 | 49% |
| | Female | 6596 | 6451 | 51% |
| Region | North East | 415 | 507 | 4% |
| | North West | 1142 | 1369 | 11% |
| | Yorkshire and the Humber | 850 | 1028 | 8% |
| | East Midlands | 735 | 911 | 7% |
| | West Midlands | 885 | 1099 | 9% |
| | East of England | 957 | 1160 | 9% |
| | London | 1213 | 1643 | 13% |
| | South East | 1423 | 1709 | 14% |
| | South West | 846 | 1074 | 9% |
| | NET: England | 8466 | 10500 | 84% |
| | Wales | 1270 | 613 | 5% |
| | Scotland | 2043 | 1071 | 9% |

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|--|------------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | Northern Ireland | 752 | 347 | 3% |
| Social grade | ABC1 | 6660 | 6618 | 53% |
| | C2DE | 5871 | 5913 | 47% |
| Ethnicity | White | 11307 | 11129 | 89% |
| | Ethnic minority | 1224 | 1402 | 11% |
| Has health condition/ disability | Yes | 3723 | 3730 | 30% |
| | No | 8640 | 8630 | 70% |
| Previous service in the UK Armed Forces | Yes | 877 | 917 | 7% |
| | No | 11654 | 11614 | 93% |

Healthcare professionals

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Total | | 549 | 549 | 100% |
| Sector | NHS | 379 | 379 | 69% |
| | Private sector | 170 | 170 | 31% |
| NHS occupation group | Allied Health Professionals, Healthcare Scientists, Scientific & Technical staff | 87 | 82 | 15% |
| | Medical / Dental staff | 28 | 30 | 5% |
| | Ambulance staff (operational) | 8 | 11 | 2% |
| | Public Health / Health Improvement | 2 | 4 | 1% |

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| | Commissioning managers / support staff | 5 | 4 | 1% |
| | Registered Nurses and Midwives | 89 | 104 | 19% |
| | Nursing or Healthcare Assistants | 39 | 26 | 5% |
| | Social care | 4 | 4 | 1% |
| | Wider Healthcare Team | 103 | 101 | 18% |
| | General managers | 8 | 7 | 1% |
| Patient facing | Yes | 439 | 441 | 80% |
| | No | 110 | 108 | 20% |

Senior decision-makers within UK employers

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Total | | 1022 | 1022 | 100% |
| Sector | Private sector | 745 | 768 | 75% |
| | Public sector | 191 | 182 | 18% |
| | Third/voluntary sector | 86 | 72 | 7% |
| Size | Micro (2-9 employees) | 181 | 143 | 14% |
| | Small (10 to 49 employees) | 192 | 153 | 15% |
| | Medium (50 to 249 employees) | 180 | 143 | 14% |
| | Large (250+ employees) | 469 | 583 | 57% |
| Private sector industry | Manufacturing | 96 | 74 | 7% |
| | Primary and utilities | 13 | 25 | 2% |
| | Construction | 71 | 59 | 6% |
| | Wholesale, retail and real estate | 137 | 141 | 14% |
| | Accommodation, food service activities and arts, entertainment and recreation | 61 | 89 | 9% |
| | Transportation and storage | 16 | 44 | 4% |
| | Financial and insurance activities | 93 | 31 | 3% |

| | | Unweighted base | Weighted base | Weighted proportion |
|--|---|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| | Information and communication | 31 | 40 | 4% |
| | Education | 20 | 16 | 2% |
| | Healthcare | 41 | 51 | 5% |
| | Business services (e.g. consultancy, law, PR, marketing, scientific and technical services) | 117 | 95 | 9% |
| | Administrative and support service activities | 7 | 14 | 1% |
| | Other service activities | 42 | 89 | 9% |

Appendix C: Composition of the focus groups and interviews

| Group | Sample frame |
|------------------|--|
| GROUP 1 | England – general public |
| GROUP 2 | Scotland – general public |
| GROUP 3 | Wales – general public |
| GROUP 4 | Northern Ireland – general public |
| GROUP 5 | UK mixed – general public |
| GROUP 6 | HR professionals across the UK |
| GROUP 7 | Those in hiring position in small businesses across the UK |
| GROUP 8 | Those in hiring position in large businesses across the UK |
| GROUP 9 | Healthcare professionals across the UK |
| GROUP 10 | Ex-service personnel across the UK |
| GROUP 11 | Ex-service personnel across the UK |
| Depth interviews | x5 interviews with journalists who write on the subject of military affairs and ex-service personnel |