

The Armed Forces & Society

**The military in Britain –
through the eyes of Service personnel,
employers and the public**

Lord Ashcroft, KCMG

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Acknowledgements

I approached the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, with the idea for this project in early 2011. In particular I sought his permission to carry out focus groups and a large-scale survey among Service personnel.

Sir David kindly agreed to the plan, and the research was subsequently organised under the auspices of his deputy, General Sir William Rollo. His staff at the Ministry of Defence worked with my own research team to develop questionnaires and discussion guides, and co-ordinated the organisation of 16 focus groups among Army, RAF, Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel throughout the UK. The Defence Analytical Services Agency distributed our survey to some 25,000 Service personnel around the world (though none currently deployed on operations).

I met the costs of this exercise. In addition, I pledged £5 to Forces charities for each completed questionnaire. As a result of the very positive response from Service personnel, I am pleased to say that four excellent organisations – ABF The Soldiers' Charity, The RAF Benevolent Fund, The Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity, and The Victoria Cross & George Cross Association – have received a total of £45,600.

I am very grateful to General Richards, General Rollo, Anthea Lemmon at the Ministry of Defence, Lisa Carey of DASA, the Commanding Officers who allowed us to hold focus groups on their establishments, and Service men and women of all ranks who took part in the project. I particularly appreciate the confidence they placed in me, and my team, by allowing us extraordinary (I believe, unprecedented) access to defence personnel and by not seeking to constrain our questioning.

My sincere thanks also to Major General Anthony Cucolo, Colonel John Radke, and the personnel and veterans of the US Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard who contributed to the American end of the study.

Finally, I should make clear that while the Ministry of Defence has given valuable support in conducting the research, responsibility for the interpretation of the results, and the conclusions drawn, lies with me. Unless specifically attributed elsewhere, the views expressed in this report are mine.

Introduction

When British combat troops withdraw in 2014, their operation in Afghanistan will have lasted thirteen years. During that time, as a result of their commitments in that country, as well as Iraq, Libya and throughout the world, our Armed Forces have been in the public eye for longer and to a greater degree than at any time since the Second World War.

This year, we mark thirty years since our Forces liberated the Falkland Islands from invasion.

By the end of 2015, some 17,000 of our Service personnel will have been made redundant. Most of them will be looking for new civilian careers at a time when jobs are hard to come by.

For all of these reasons, it is an appropriate time to take stock of our relationship with our Armed Forces and the men and women who serve in them. How do we in Britain see our military? Do we think Service personnel, and former personnel, get the recognition we believe they deserve? What is the perspective of those currently serving in the Forces, and those who have recently done so? What impressions do employers have of the kind of person they would be taking on if they hired someone leaving the Services?

To explore these questions – with the kind permission of the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, and organisational help from the Ministry of Defence – I have conducted a unique independent survey of military personnel, together with focus groups of members of the Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines. Research was also carried out among former Service personnel, the general public, and those responsible for recruitment in small and medium sized businesses (which provide the bulk of jobs). Further focus groups among personnel in the US Armed Services and a poll of the American public have offered an instructive comparison for the way public support can find tangible expression.

The purpose of this work is not to ask whether the government does enough for the troops, whether public resources are allocated in the right way, or to assess the provision available to serving or former personnel. That is a separate debate. Here I am interested the perceptions of the Forces and wider society about the relationship that exists between them. There is more to a society than its government.

Not surprisingly, we found public support for the military to be very high, both in absolute terms and in comparison to other popular British institutions like the NHS and the BBC. Service personnel felt this to be the case, and that support had increased in recent years; indeed those who had served longest often said public esteem for the Forces was higher than they had ever known it. However, Service personnel felt – as most of the public readily admitted – that most people outside the military know little or nothing about day-to-day life in the Forces. Some of those

we spoke to in more senior ranks were concerned that, since the improvement in public support was down to greater visibility in recent years, so it might begin to wane after current missions ended.

Also not surprisingly, the public had a very high regard for serving personnel, though they tended to think many of them probably joined in the first place for want of any other option. When speaking about individual members of the Forces people would usually mention, before very long, what they regarded as the very high risk of their being injured or killed. In the poll, more than nine out of ten thought it was common or very common for personnel leaving the Forces to have some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem (though personnel themselves did not seem to share this view). It was also the public's strong impression that official provision for those with very serious injuries, such as the loss of a limb, must be inadequate, since they seemed to have to rely on charities for their care. In turn, some personnel were concerned that although the public view of Service personnel was mainly characterised by pride and respect, the profile of charities like Help For Heroes and the Wootton Bassett repatriation ceremonies – both of which personnel admired and appreciated greatly – had combined to create a situation whereby sympathy had come to play a significant part in the public attitude to the Forces. Gratitude for their work was appropriate, as was appreciation of the hardships they endure and the personal risks they take, but the last thing members of the Forces wanted was for people to feel sorry for them.

There have rightly been moves in recent years to encourage personnel to wear their uniform in public outside ceremonial occasions. Some are still reluctant to do this, but most of those who do so have encountered a positive response from the public. More than half of all personnel had been approached by strangers offering thanks and support, and some had been bought drinks or been offered discounts in shops or other businesses.

Shockingly, though, more than one in five members of the Forces said they had experienced strangers shouting abuse at them while wearing their uniform in public in the UK in the last five years. Nearly one in twenty said they had experienced violence or attempted violence. Forces personnel, of all people, can take care of themselves – but it is absolutely unacceptable for those who serve to be treated in this way.

Those responsible for these incidents naturally represent a tiny minority of the population. Goodwill towards Service personnel is abundant, though people are often unsure how it can be expressed appropriately. In our survey, two thirds of the American public said they had personally thanked a member of the Armed Forces or could see themselves doing so. This compared to just over a quarter of the public in Britain. Of those in Britain who said they could not imagine doing this, more than half said this was because they would be embarrassed, or they thought the person in uniform would be embarrassed. But the serving personnel we spoke to were usually pleased and encouraged when people took the trouble to speak to them – not to ask

about their experiences, which they quite understandably do not want to discuss, but to offer a quiet word of thanks and support. It is something we could do more often.

Nearly two thirds of the public said they thought there was too little recognition for the Armed Forces in British society. Those who disagreed tended to stress that they appreciated what they did, but people who joined the military chose their careers and did not need to be put on a pedestal. Personnel were more likely to say there was too little recognition of veterans than that there was too little for those currently in the Forces; veterans in turn said it was those still serving who should be acknowledged. Officers were the least likely to say there should be more recognition; those at junior levels were more likely to say that more would be welcome.

When it came to what form any greater recognition could take, discussion often turned to the American way of doing things. Both Service personnel and the public had the impression that Americans went somewhat over the top in extolling their military. The custom of asking members of the Services to stand for the applause of the crowd at sports or entertainment events, for example, seemed rather alien to many of the British personnel who had experienced it. (American personnel for their part also sometimes said they found it uncomfortable, but that it served a useful purpose in showing younger members, particularly those who had been injured, that they were appreciated. They also believed it helped reinforce the standing of Service personnel, underlining their role in protecting America's freedoms and signalling to children that they deserved respect – a particularly important factor for those who remembered how many veterans were treated on their return from Vietnam).

Despite their scepticism about the exuberant American manner of celebrating their military, British personnel who had visited the United States had enjoyed its culture of appreciation for members of the Services. "The American model without the cringe factor" (or "the good stuff without the high fives") summed up what would be the ideal situation for many British personnel. The most tangible example of this was the routine availability of military discounts in a wide variety of businesses. This made them feel valued, as well as allowing a slightly higher standard of living, especially for more junior ranks.

A quarter of British Forces said in our survey that they had spontaneously been offered military discounts in the UK. About two thirds said they sometimes asked for one, and about half of these said this sometimes worked. Still, many did not like to ask, not just for fear of refusal but to avoid the embarrassment of a delay while the assistant went to ask a manager while a queue built up. When asked what one extra thing society could do to recognise them, wider availability of well-advertised Forces discounts were the most frequent suggestion from current personnel. A number of companies already offer such discounts – it would be a fitting gesture of support for more to join them.

Often, personnel emphasised that a bigger priority was for them not to be disadvantaged in society because they were in the Forces. Several noted that, where

these disadvantages were related to access to public services, the Armed Forces Covenant was an acknowledgement that problems existed and an attempt to address them – though some personnel said they would reserve judgment until they saw practical changes to back up the good intentions.

A number of personnel gave examples of problems they faced in their dealings with private businesses. Nearly three quarters of those serving overseas said they had experienced companies refusing to deliver to British Forces Post Office (BFPO) addresses. Many companies seemed not to understand that a BFPO address is not an overseas address, or charged over the odds for delivering goods to them. BFPO and Royal Mail have recently introduced a new database to make it easier for systems to recognise BFPO addresses; companies should make sure they take advantage of it.

Personnel also frequently complained that their inevitably regular changes of address counted against them when it came to credit checks, even though they had a secure job with a good income, and in many cases owned a property. More than a quarter said they had been refused a mortgage, loan or credit card in the last five years, and nearly one in five had had trouble getting a mobile phone contract.

When it came to looking towards leaving the Forces, the biggest concern among current personnel was finding a good job. As a whole, they were more likely to think their pay, job satisfaction, job security, other benefits, and overall package would be worse in their future civilian role than it was in the Forces. This was partly because they recognised their combination of pay, subsidised housing, pension provision and other facilities made their current package quite competitive.

However, the widespread pessimism about future prospects also sprang from the fear that civilian employers would not understand what they had to offer as a result of their time in the Forces. Most were confident in their own skills, and many young personnel in particular had had responsibilities well beyond those of most civilians of the same age. They also acknowledged that a good deal of support and advice was available to Service leavers to help them find and apply for civilian jobs. The bigger barrier, they felt, was that employers with no experience of military people – which was to say, most of them – would not grasp how their skills and experience would be useful to a civilian organisation, or may even avoid them, fearing they would be institutionalised or difficult to work with.

Among some in the more junior ranks, particularly in the infantry, the problem was worse because they themselves probably underestimated what they had to offer a future employer. Despite their experience, and the opportunities available to them, many felt that when they left the Forces they would effectively be starting their careers from scratch, perhaps even competing with school leavers for unskilled jobs.

Our survey found that employers regard former Forces personnel in a positive light, but may well underestimate what they have to offer. The characteristics they thought Service leavers were most likely to possess to a greater degree than their civilian counterparts were rather generic: ability to follow instructions, the capacity

to work well under stress, time management, a positive attitude to work. They do have these characteristics, and they are important. But they have more to offer than that. Bluntly, there is more to former Service personnel than reliability and shiny shoes.

This is particularly true when it comes to management – one of the roles employers said they found hardest to fill. A quarter of employers thought those who had served in the other ranks were unlikely to have people management skills. Yet as we were regularly reminded, the bulk of the day-to-day leadership and motivation of personnel is not done by officers. Even relatively junior ranks often have leadership experience and other responsibilities that their civilian contemporaries would find it hard to compete with. These functions are often exercised in situations of extreme pressure that require them to think on their feet – yet more than a fifth of employers thought other ranks were unlikely to be able to come up with creative solutions to problems, and a quarter thought them unlikely to be able to make decisions independently.

It is unrealistic to expect the Forces comprehensively to educate employers about the attributes of their personnel – their responsibility is to defend the country, after all – and many employers will naturally not have come across former Service members. So my call to employers who are recruiting is to think more about the experiences and skills of those leaving the Forces, and what they could have to offer an organisation.

Finally, I do not claim to have set out here a comprehensive programme for the proper recognition of the Forces. Some ideas have emerged, however. If you see a member of the Services in uniform and you appreciate what they do, go and tell them so. If you are in a position to offer discounts to military personnel, and to make sure they are aware of it, it is a gesture they will appreciate. If your company ships products to consumers but does not deliver to BFPO addresses, or charges more than it could for doing so, put that right. If your business provides services on the basis of credit checks to individuals, make sure you recognise that for someone in the Forces, frequent changes of address do not necessarily mean they are a bad risk. And if you are an employer, consider actively recruiting people leaving the Services, not just because of what they have done for the country but because of what they could do for you.

How British society can appropriately recognise its Armed Forces is a question that needs further discussion and debate. I hope the findings of this study will contribute to that debate and ultimately benefit those who have served, or serve today.

*MAA
May 2012*

Methodology

Service personnel – UK

- A survey of 9,106 Service personnel was conducted between November 2011 and January 2012. A sample of 25,000 was selected by the Defence Analytical Services Agency and results were weighted to be representative of the Armed Forces as a whole. For each survey completed, £5 was pledged to four Service charities.
- 16 focus groups of Service personnel were conducted in September and October 2011. Separate groups were held of officers and other ranks. Groups were conducted at the following locations:
 - **Army:** Catterick Garrison; RMA Sandhurst; Defence Academy HQ, Shrivenham; Land Warfare Centre, Warminster
 - **Royal Air Force:** RAF High Wycombe; RAF Cranwell
 - **Royal Navy:** HMS Sultan, Gosport
 - **Royal Marines:** Norton Manor Camp, Taunton; Commando Training Centre, Lympstone
- In the analysis, “higher ranks” refers to commissioned officers, “middle ranks” means Senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Warrant Officers, and “lower ranks” means those up to and including Junior Non-Commissioned Officers.

Service personnel – US

- Seven focus groups of Service personnel were conducted in February 2012. The groups included personnel from the US Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, ranging from junior enlisted ranks to senior officers. The groups were conducted in San Antonio, Texas; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Washington, DC; and at the Pentagon.

Former Service personnel

- Five focus groups of former Service personnel were held in Manchester and London in December 2011 and March 2012. The groups comprised officers and other ranks from the Army, RAF and Royal Navy. Participants had left the Forces within the last 10 years.

General public – UK

- Six focus groups were conducted in London, Leeds and Worcester in November 2011. Participants varied in age social background. None had served in the Forces or had military connections. Separate groups were held of men and women.

- An online survey of 2,033 UK adults was conducted on 13-14 March 2012. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the UK.

General public – US

- An online survey of 2,048 US adults was conducted between 19-25 March 2012. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the US.

Employers

- A survey of 508 small and medium sized companies was conducted by telephone in January 2012. Respondents all had responsibility for recruitment and hiring.

Full data tables for the polls can be found at lordashcroftpolls.com

The Armed Forces & Society

Public support for the Armed Forces

Public support for the Armed Forces in our survey was very high indeed, both in absolute terms and in comparison with other major UK institutions. Asked to say how positive or negative their view was on scale of 0 to 10, respondents gave a mean score of 7.47 – ahead of the NHS (6.61), the BBC (6.39) and the police (6.23). Older respondents gave more positive scores than younger ones: 18-34 year olds gave a mean score of 6.87, compared to 8.12 among those aged 65 or older.

This result was comparable to that in our US poll, in which Americans gave a mean score of 7.68 for the US Armed Services, well above their local police department (6.39) and the Supreme Court (5.38). While there was a similar pattern of higher scores among older respondents, men in the US gave a higher mean score for the Services than women (7.98 compared to 7.40), and were more likely to give a maximum score of 10 (38% of men, 26% of women).

While the British and American public had a similarly high regard for their Armed Forces, there was some evidence that they each see the military in slightly different terms. When British respondents who gave high scores (6 or above) were asked why they had done so, nearly half said the Forces did an important job very well, and often added that they themselves would not want to do it. Asked the same question, two thirds of US respondents said it was because the military protected or defended the country, or kept Americans safe. Similarly, American personnel talked about the US being at war, while those in the UK did not.

Three quarters of serving UK personnel thought the relationship between the Armed Forces and the public had improved in the last five years. Indeed, the longer they had been in the Forces, the more likely they were to think this: 85% of those who had served more than 20 years thought the relationship had improved. Overall, 92% of personnel thought the public felt positive about the Forces, including 26% who thought the public view was very positive. Personnel went out of their way to emphasise that they felt the public supported the Forces even if they did not agree with recent operations on which they had been deployed. In the poll, 80% agreed that this was the case.

"I don't think there has ever been a time when I have been in the Army when we've had a higher profile and been thought of more highly by people".

British Army groups

"The difference is that the average citizen now knows the difference between policy and the job we do... I think that's a huge leap".

British Army groups

37% of the public in the UK said their opinion of the Forces had improved in recent years (ranging from 33% of 18-34s to 41% of those aged 55 or over), though more than half said their view had stayed the same. This overall figure was slightly higher than among American respondents, one third of whom said their opinion of their military had improved in the last few years.

Just over a quarter of UK personnel said they expected the relationship between the Forces and the public to improve further in the next five years, and more than half expected it to stay the same. Higher ranks were less optimistic, however: they were twice as likely to think the relationship would deteriorate (24%) as they were to think it would improve (12%). In the focus groups, officers in particular felt that as the welcome increase in public support over recent years was due to the very visible engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan, it would inevitably decline as these missions came to an end and began to fade from memory.

The Forces and the government

Serving personnel were less positive and less optimistic about the Forces' relationship with the government than with the public. Nearly two thirds thought the relationship was positive overall, though there was some variation between the Services: 70% of Royal Marines thought the relationship was positive, compared to 68% in the Army, 63% in the RAF and 56% in the Royal Navy. More than a third of Service personnel thought the relationship had deteriorated over the last five years, while only 19% thought it had improved. 39% thought it would get worse over the next five years. More than half of higher ranks (55%) expected this, compared to 43% of middle and 33% of lower ranks.

Despite the similarly high perceived and actual levels of public support, US personnel felt that they were a political priority in Washington in a way that UK personnel did not feel they were in Westminster. Some personnel in both countries speculated that this was partly because American politicians were more likely to have served in the military, or to represent large military constituencies.

Perceptions of Service personnel

As there was for the Armed Forces as a whole, there was great respect and even admiration among the public for individual Service personnel. Asked what word or phrase first came to mind when they thought of people in the Forces, by far the most common response was "brave" or "courageous". This was also the case in the US, as was the next most popular answer: a selection of positive attributes including "dedicated", "disciplined", "loyal" and "professional". Next was the word "heroes". In the UK poll, the public's fourth most common top-of-mind descriptions of Service personnel (albeit a very small proportion of overall responses) were associated with low intelligence. US respondents did not characterise their personnel in this way.

In our poll of the UK public, more than nine out of ten thought it was common for those leaving the Forces to have “some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem” as a result of their time in the military; more than a third (34%) thought it was “very common” for this to be the case. (Similar proportions said the same in the US survey.) Personnel themselves said that, although they were a real risk, these problems were probably less common than many people thought.

In the focus groups, what they regarded as the very high risk of serious injury was among the first things members of the public mentioned when discussing Service personnel. Some participants, recalling stories from early in the Iraq conflict, believed the risk was exacerbated by a lack of suitable kit and equipment – though again, this concern was not echoed by serving personnel, several of whom noted that kit and equipment had improved substantially in recent years.

The public also had the strong impression that not enough was done to treat and care for those who had been injured, and often observed that this work was having to be done by charities like Help for Heroes instead. In his introduction to the charity’s first annual review in 2009, Help for Heroes chairman Hadyn Parry emphasised that the organisation was not critical of the care providers or those who set the level of care: “we simply want them to have more resources so they can provide the best support. We want to top up whatever resources are available”. For many members of the public, though, and some former personnel, the very existence of Help for Heroes was regarded as proof that the care provided through official means must be inadequate.

“Help for Heroes reminds me that the government isn’t taking care of soldiers. It’s not my job to contribute to what the government should be doing. I pay enough in taxes”.

UK public groups

“The people who have lost limbs in Afghanistan are relying on Help for Heroes. They shouldn’t be relying on a charity. The government should be supporting them for that.”

UK former personnel groups

Asked to choose from a number of descriptions of how they thought the public felt towards them, two thirds of UK personnel thought people were “supportive”, more than half chose “proud” and 47% thought “respectful”. Just over a third, though, (34%) chose “sympathetic”. This was also mentioned, with a note of concern, by some personnel in the focus groups. Though they hugely admired the work of Help for Heroes, there was some concern that the charity’s high profile meant that too often the image of Service personnel in the public mind was linked to dreadful

injuries. This, they felt, was linked in the public mind to the repatriation ceremonies at Royal Wootton Bassett, which they also greatly appreciated – but they were wary of allowing sympathy to play too great a part in the public attitude to the Forces.

“Would the public’s opinion not be sympathy, because they’ve seen these guys coming back from Afghanistan injured and being carried in coffins? Is it not sympathy as opposed to respect?”

UK former personnel groups

“It’s a real shame that public perception is driven by things like Help for Heroes. It’s almost like you’ve got to wheel out a horrific picture of a soldier with no legs and things like that.”

UK former personnel groups

“We must not overplay our public sympathy, because at the end of the day, we volunteered for this. Nobody forced us into it. We need to keep it in the public eye, but if we go too far people will get fed up with it.”

RAF groups

Awareness and understanding

Service personnel thought the public understood very little about what the Armed Forces actually did. More than two thirds thought the public were quite badly or very badly informed about day-to-day life in the Forces. They thought most people had a distorted view of what they did on operations, and even less idea of how they spent their time between deployments. Several personnel said the first thing civilians usually wanted to know was whether they had killed anyone. However, they thought the public currently had a greater understanding of the dangers and sacrifices they faced than had been the case a few years ago.

“The first thing you get asked when you tell people you’re in the Army is ‘have you killed anyone?’ Straight away, it’s the first thing they ask you. I say, ‘I’ve been driving. I’ve been on a driving course in Macclesfield’.”

British Army groups

“My cousin’s wife thought that we just literally sat around doing nothing. There was no day-to-day job, we just sat around waiting for a war”.

British Army groups

“If you make some generalisations between Gulf One and now, the public awareness of sacrifices that have been made by serving military is extraordinary. And the recent activity we have seen from the celebrity community and others in public support of that is stratospheric compared to five years ago, let alone ten or twenty.”

Former UK personnel groups

For their part, the public readily admitted their ignorance: 62% said they knew “not very much” or “very little” about what a member of the Forces did on a day-to-day basis (though men were considerably more likely than women to claim they knew “quite a lot” or “a great deal”). While most Service personnel thought this was perfectly reasonable – why would the public want or need to know any more about Forces life than they did? – it meant that public support might not be based on a full understanding of their role or what it entailed.

“People in the civilian world don’t necessarily understand the amount of moving around you do. It’s difficult for them to understand the pressures and the way of life you take for granted.”

RAF groups

The Forces and the media

More than three quarters of the public thought the media tended to portray the Forces positively. Two thirds of these people thought this positive portrayal was fair and accurate, while one third thought the media deliberately focused on the positive and ignored more negative aspects. Among the few who thought coverage tended to be negative, the reverse was the case: 84% of them thought the media deliberately focused on negative things and ignored the positive. There was a similar pattern in the US, though the American public were four times as likely as the British public to think their military was portrayed negatively by the media.

Nearly four fifths of UK Service personnel thought the media had a positive view of the Forces – though officers (87%) were more likely to think this than the most junior ranks (75%) – and nearly half thought the relationship between the media and the Forces had improved over the past five years. 40% thought the media were quite well or very well informed about day-to-day life in the Forces, a higher proportion than said the same of the general public.

However, the focus groups revealed some ambivalence towards the media and its portrayal of the military. In general they felt the coverage was reasonable and improving, as papers reflected the growing public support for the Forces among their readers. This improvement was not thought to be universal, though, and some felt it was more to do with following readers’ sympathies than any desire to be helpful.

"The media has got a lot better because we're on influential jobs and we're doing taskings that are stressful and demanding. They're keener to get that, whereas before it was about drunken squaddies rampaging."

British Army groups

"The support is from the same newspaper that printed dodgy photos in the back of a four-tonner. They'll happily print a story about an officer who's shagging a soldier's wife, but then on the next page it will be 'Back Our Boys'. So, which is it going to be?"

British Army groups

Nine out of ten Service personnel thought that recent fly-on-the-wall documentaries were having a positive impact on what the public thinks of the Forces. Again, some in the groups said that these programmes were prone to sensationalism and sometimes gave a distorted impression, or reinforced stereotypes. In general, though, they helped inform the public what life in the Forces entailed.

"In these programmes there used to be some drill sergeant marching around on a parade square, shouting. People would say 'I don't know how you put up with that'. Well, I didn't, because that was basic training. If someone had spoken to me like that for 20 years I would have been out of the door. The public are now more in tune with what is going on. Now it is 'you must find it horrendous' and 'how many people have you killed?'"

UK former personnel groups

RAF and Royal Navy personnel often complained that the media only ever talked about the Army, even when covering operations which they themselves were carrying out. As well as being irritating in itself, some felt that this imbalance led the public to misunderstand their role and underestimate its importance.

"On the news they say 'Army helicopters' and there's a Chinook. That annoys me so much".

RAF groups

"I think the Army is being portrayed really well at the moment, but the public aren't really aware of what the Navy is doing in places like Afghan, Iraq and obviously Libya. The focus seems to be very Army. Even the Marines don't really get a look in."

Royal Navy groups

“There’s nothing more annoying than watching the BBC or Sky News talking about ‘the Army’ and in the background there are people in Naval uniform. The floods were the best example. They were interviewing a sailor, but saying, ‘right, the soldiers are here’. It doesn’t do our perception any good. Nobody has any idea what we do”.

Royal Navy groups

“The Navy in particular have an image problem. ‘There’s all this stuff going on – Navy, what are you doing?’ From the public perception, ‘we’re swanning around the Caribbean drinking cocktails, we thought we might go down and have a look at some penguins, and then come back via some other places where we can drink cocktails.’ The fact that we can park a piece of sovereign territory twenty miles off the coast and throw four-and-a-half inch shells inland into Libya is an awesome capability that we just don’t brag about enough.”

Royal Navy groups

US personnel had similar complaints about the American media’s coverage of the military – in particular, that they concentrated on bad news and did not give a rounded view of their operations.

“You hardly ever see the good things out there. You always see, this person got blown up or this company got shot down.”

US personnel groups

“They always show the war aspect of things. They never show the peaceful missions where we go out and give food to the civilians over there and help the people out.”

US personnel groups

Public reaction to the uniform

61% of Service personnel said they rarely or never wore their uniform in public in the UK in everyday situations. Of these, nearly half said this was mainly because their routine meant they were not in uniform outside work, and nearly a fifth were encouraged or instructed not to do so, usually for security reasons. However, more than a third (35%) of those who rarely or never wore their uniform in public outside ceremonial occasions said this was because they preferred not to stand out as a member of the Forces.

More than half of all personnel – including nearly two thirds of Army respondents – said strangers had approached them to offer thanks or support while wearing their uniform in public. 29% said strangers had offered to buy them drinks or similar, and a quarter (including a third of Army respondents) had received spontaneous offers of discounts in shops or other businesses.

However, more than a fifth had experienced strangers shouting abuse, and 18% (including a quarter of Royal Marines) had been refused service in pubs, hotels or elsewhere. More than one in twenty had experienced violence or attempted violence while out in their uniform in the UK.

In general, Service personnel were much more likely to say the overall reception they received when out in uniform was positive than that it was negative, and more than half said the public reaction to them as a member of the Forces had improved since the time they joined. Many described friendly encounters with members of the public – including people wishing them well at airports on their way back from Afghanistan, and a lady who spent £70 on Greggs sausage rolls for a group of soldiers out in the centre of Warrington – which they found encouraging and affirming. Some said this was a relatively new development which, though they appreciated it, felt rather strange given the self-effacing nature of most personnel.

A number of personnel described rather more mixed experiences of wearing their uniform in public, particularly in multicultural areas. A few had encountered negative reactions closer to home, including from staff at their children’s schools. Several RAF personnel noted that people did not seem to recognise their uniform, and sometimes thought they worked for the RAC.

“There’s a totally different reaction from the public now. People will stop and talk to you and thank you in the street, some look at your medals and ask what they’re for. I don’t mind. If they’ve made the effort to support you, the least you can do is give five minutes of your time. We should be grateful.”

British Army groups

“Once on the tube I was wearing my bowler hat and my medal, because I was on my way to the Cavalry memorial parade. Someone just came up to me out of the blue and said ‘thanks for all your service’. I didn’t know how to take it. I felt a bit aghast. I’m glad someone had the courage to do it, but then, what’s your response? ‘Well, I’m just doing my job’. That’s the sort of thing you’re not taught to deal with in the Army.”

UK former personnel groups

"I work on my regiment's casualty fund and we do some fairly high profile stuff with rugby at Harlequins. The response you get from the public is pretty impressive. They really have a huge amount of respect, they love seeing the guys in uniform. They probably don't get to connect much with soldiers on a day-to-day basis and have a chance to chat, but they throw money at them and are very warm and friendly."

UK former personnel groups

"Working in Leicester as a recruiter I make a point of walking to and from work in my uniform, and it's still mixed. I have people running up and screaming 'baby killer' at me. I've had people spit at me. Equally, last week this great huge bloke, shaved head, beard, earrings, tattoos, stood up and gave me a round of applause, said 'well done love, I'm very proud'."

RAF groups

"When my boy started school I would pick him up in uniform, and I was asked by the head specifically not to go in uniform because it upset the parents. I do, though, and it doesn't upset the parents. It was a school issue, and the view of the staff. So the military is not universally popular."

Royal Navy groups

Despite the high proportion of Forces respondents who had been thanked by a member of the public, only 8% of the public said they themselves had thanked a member of the Forces (less than a quarter of the proportion of the US public who said they had done so). A further 19% in Britain said they could see themselves doing so, compared to 34% in the US. Altogether, then, two thirds of the American public said they had thanked a member of the Forces or could see themselves doing so, compared to just over a quarter in the UK.

Of those who could not see themselves approaching a member of the Forces to thank them, just over a third said they would be embarrassed to do so – and several people in focus groups said they felt proud and grateful, or even that it sent "a shiver down my spine" when they saw a member of the Forces in uniform, but they would never approach them – and nearly a fifth said they thought the person in uniform would be embarrassed. Nearly half said they did not think it necessary or appropriate to thank members of the Forces for their service. Overall, 40% of 18-34 year-olds thought it unnecessary or inappropriate (more than twice the level for Americans of the same age), compared to 27% of those aged 65 or over (which was more than four times the level for their American counterparts).

For US personnel, being approached by members of the public was a routine and longstanding part of the culture. They appreciated this and said it was important for them to know they had people's support. At the same time, some said it happened

so often that it could be inconvenient – though they would always be respectful and take seriously their responsibility as an ambassador for their Service.

"I don't know how stars and athletes do it. You'll be in uniform sometimes and it's like 'thank you, thank you', and I'm just trying to get the grapes. I appreciate the appreciation, I'm glad that everybody's proud that I'm a female in the United States Army, but there are those occasions when you just want to get out of the door."

US personnel groups

Several younger Army and Royal Marines personnel in particular said that in the areas around where they were based, their uniforms, or even their presence in town (easily recognisable without the uniform), sometimes attracted aggression. Young men living locally either wanted the dubious distinction of fighting with members of the Forces or resentfully saw them – with good reason, the servicemen cheerfully admitted – as more attractive prospects for the local young women.

There were some complaints from personnel, echoed by the public, about the unfairness of Forces being barred from pubs and elsewhere, even if a few members had been involved in trouble. However, some more senior personnel in particular acknowledged that there could be a degree of "bravado" on both sides, which could be tiresome for local landlords and fellow customers, and this – rather than straightforward hostility to the Forces – was what probably lay behind examples of personnel being refused service.

"If I think of one of the towns we're based near, it's a small and very poor town. The lads go downtown, they're a stone or two heavier than the local lads their age. They've got a full set of teeth and money in their pocket, and the local lads get upset because the local girls are going to go to the better-looking lads with more money. That's going to cause friction."

Royal Marines groups

"There is a minority of small-minded people who see the uniform, see the flashes, and think 'they're superhuman, I'm going to have a go at them'. They feel better about themselves if they can beat up a Marine."

Royal Marines groups

"There's a pub across the road here in Camberley that for years had a plaque outside the door saying 'No MOD Personnel'. This is demonisation. If it was Mr Joe Public who'd head-butted a barmaid or whatever it was, the rest of the public wouldn't be banned, would they? They say 'he's a soldier, therefore soldiers are trouble'. There hasn't been a big case about discriminating against soldiers, so it's easy to do. 'No soldiers, you're trouble'."

British Army groups

Public recognition: British and American approaches

The general public were more likely than Service personnel themselves to think society does not sufficiently recognise and reward members of the Forces. In the poll, 62% of the public (including nearly three quarters of those aged 65 or over) said that British society – as distinct from the government – “should do more to recognise and support people in the Armed Forces”. Meanwhile, only 50% of Service personnel agreed that “there isn’t much recognition for current Service personnel, and there should be more”.

Around a third of the public thought the current level of recognition was about right, as did nearly half of serving personnel (three quarters of whom thought there was rightly quite a lot of recognition, with the rest agreeing “there isn’t much recognition for current Service personnel, but I’m happy with that”). Several people in the focus groups of the general public emphasised that though they were grateful for what the Forces did, personnel chose their career and did not need any special public reward over and above general respect, decent terms of employment, care when they were injured, and support for their families when bereaved. A number of current and former personnel themselves echoed this view.

“They know what they’re doing when they sign that bit of paper. Good luck to them and thanks very much for protecting the country, but that’s what they’re paid to do, and if they don’t want to do it they can leave”.

UK public groups

“At the end of the day, they’re paying you for what you’ve done. They’re paying for the service you give them. Every taxpayer. So I don’t think they need to thank anyone, really”.

Former personnel groups

Despite the appetite for more to be done to recognise and reward members of the Forces, members of the public found it hard to think what form this could take. Many felt there was more the government could do, particularly given their impression that care for injured personnel was not what it should be, but struggled with new ideas of how individuals or wider society could show their appreciation in a fitting way, that members of the Forces would gladly accept, and which did not involve spending money (which most thought would be unnecessary and inappropriate).

“I don’t think we know what to do. I wouldn’t pat them on the shoulder because it would offend them. If someone led us, I would consider it. But I wouldn’t know where to start.”

UK public groups

"They could march through Leeds city centre or something. You don't want to give them money but you want to pay your respects."

UK public groups

"I don't think we should herald them. It would embarrass them."

UK public groups

Service personnel listed a number of ways in which they currently felt recognised by the public. Remembrance events and homecoming parades, people quietly coming up to shake their hand, parcels posted by strangers to make life on operations more comfortable, were all appreciated and added to a sense that they had the country's support, which was important to them.

"When I was in Selly Oak hospital an 80 year-old lady walked past when I was sitting in reception and said 'ooh, with your straight back you could be a soldier'. I said, 'well, I am a soldier', and she said, 'can I give you a kiss?' It was quite poignant."

British Army groups

"A lot of people come over and just very quietly say, 'are you in the Army?' and they just shake your hand. It's a very British way to do it, which is nice."

British Army groups

"When we were in Afghan, primary schools were sending us parcels and letters. It's brilliant getting that, a proper morale booster."

British Army groups

While the public were willing to do more if they could think of ways of doing so, Service personnel themselves were rather ambivalent about the question of greater public recognition. They were very clear that they wanted a level playing field with the rest of society and should not be disadvantaged as a result of their service (a theme which will be explored further in the next chapter), but were equally adamant that they did not wish to be "put on a pedestal". A number of participants said how much they appreciated the public reaction on occasions when they had paraded on their return from Afghanistan. They often noted, though, that – quite understandably – the Forces did not cross most people's minds from one day to the next.

"When we came back last year the lads really couldn't put a foot wrong. There were thousands of people stood waving and cheering in Taunton in howling, pouring rain. The feeling is incredible from people in the town."

Royal Marines groups

“Supporting the military might be a bit like supporting a charity – when it’s in your face and you have your Red Nose Day, you support them. In normal day-to-day life, it doesn’t cross your mind. And I don’t expect it to”.

Royal Marines groups

“They will support us because they see us doing a good job in Afghanistan, but how does that affect Joe Public’s everyday life? It doesn’t. We are defending them in a tangential kind of way, but we are not pulling them out when their house is on fire, or mending them when they have a car accident. So I am not sure that how we are valued by society has really changed that much. I certainly don’t think the MOD will get a bigger share of GDP in years to come, and that’s the bottom line.”

RAF groups

Many referred to the American way of doing things. On visits to the US they had found military discounts to be routine, and indeed been offered discounts themselves by virtue of their service in the British Forces. They had also enjoyed, within limits, the broader culture of public appreciation for the military. However, many of them reacted against what they saw as over-the-top public adulation of a kind which they would not feel comfortable with in Britain: “the American model without the cringe factor” would be ideal, one suggested. The public tended to share this view – though both public and personnel often argued that a little more British patriotism would not go amiss.

“I stopped off in an airport in America and there was a massive flag and loads of posters saying ‘Welcome home troops’. I thought, bloody hell, you don’t get that in Manchester Airport.”

British Army groups

“The Americans have got it right. They’re less cynical people. They genuinely believe their armed forces are the first and last line of defence for their country. Patriotism plays a massive part, whereas I don’t think it plays any part, really, in British cultural life.”

British Army groups

“With regard to the amount of public reaction we get in the UK, I feel quite happy with it, it’s appropriate. If we were to compare it with the US, I wouldn’t want to be on some kind of pedestal. I think British society holds us in esteem, and I think it’s appropriate.”

British Army groups

"I went to America and I actually felt quite proud of it. I didn't stand up for applause at Sea World, I have to say. But getting to the front door and not having to pay, very discreet, ID card and you're in, no questions asked – I thought, actually this is quite cool. I feel valued here."

British Army groups

"I was at a baseball game and they put footage on a big screen about our boys in Iraq. The whole stadium just stood up and watched it. We thought, 'crikey, this is a bit intense!' Can I see that being done at the FA Cup Final? No, certainly not. That's the Rolls Royce and we're nowhere near. It would maybe be nice to see just a few things heading in the right direction."

Royal Navy groups

"To compare us with America is a bit unfair because we're not like that. They put a big thing on the screen at Sea World, and the military stand up and get a round of applause. Now I would not have stood up because I don't want to advertise it. I wouldn't want that attention. If they started doing that here, you wouldn't want to leave your house."

British Army groups

"The Americans are more patriotic. They are mental for their Army and that's not going to catch on here. We're not flag kind of people."

UK public groups

"I think we would like to be treated a bit more like the American model without the cringe factor. We'd like all the good stuff without the high fives."

Royal Marines groups

American Service personnel acknowledged that they had huge public support. Three important factors were often cited: the impact of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent greater visibility of the military arising from Iraq and Afghanistan; memories of the way veterans were treated on their return from Vietnam, which created a determination that it should not happen again; and a perception – at least on the part of personnel themselves – that most families in the US had some connection with the Services.

US personnel said they appreciated the support they received, including discounts and upgrades, parcels when deployed, frequent offers to pay for drinks and meals, and their generally enthusiastic public reception – though some said it made them uncomfortable to be singled out in this way. Some of the older and more senior members of the Services emphasised that while they did not particularly need these things they thought they were important for younger personnel, both financially –

since many who were not much older than 20 had several young children – and in terms of morale.

"The unit I'm in, for Wounded Warriors, gets people in the local communities to donate things for us to go to different places. Last year for Christmas we went to a Dallas Mavericks game and the people who had courtside seats gave their tickets to about fifty of us. We got to order anything we wanted, got to go to the locker rooms and talk to the players and everything."

US personnel groups

"I was out one time and a group of bikers came in. This guy had about 250 pounds of chains, gets in my face and says 'are you in the military?' I say, 'yes sir, many years'. He hugged me! He said, 'all the beer he can drink is on me, because I was in Vietnam and I will never let them do what they did to me.'"

US personnel groups

"I only travel in uniform when I have to because I want the kid coming back to get the upgrade. The PFC who's on his way home from basic training, I want him to sit in the cushy seat in first class and get a nice meal and a free drink, and have everybody up there appreciate him."

US personnel groups

"These guys are maybe 22 years old with two or three kids. They don't have the money to go and do certain things. The discount is tax deductible so the company's not losing money, but what we're gaining is military pride and association with family and togetherness. I appreciate that they do it. Someone who's 22 years old and he's got a three year-old boy, he can't afford a \$35 or \$38 ticket to get into Sea World".

US personnel groups

"Pre 9/11 I don't think anybody said anything to me, uniform or no uniform. Of course, I was in California most of those years so if people saw you in uniform they would think you were an extra in a movie. But 9/11 was a game changer. After I went to Iraq people were just overwhelmed with gratitude, and I actually became proud of my service. I was like, 'oh, OK, I did go and do that. I did serve in combat'."

US personnel groups

"I think a lot of the public feels that being in the Service, we are protecting them from the Osama Bin Ladens that come over here."

US personnel groups

"When I was Brigade Commander and had to jump down to headquarters, I would go in uniform. I would get stopped along the way and thanked and 'let me buy you lunch'. It was uncomfortable for me. And when they try to force you into first class and say 'please, on us', I'm just very uncomfortable."

US personnel groups

The feelings of US personnel about being formally recognised at sports or entertainment events, however, were rather more mixed than their British counterparts might have supposed. Several said they were rather embarrassed at being asked to stand for public applause, and said they did not need that kind of reward simply for doing their job. At the same time, many said that such displays had an important function in assuring young or injured personnel that they were appreciated, and showing young people more generally that the military deserved respect.

"At first, your first year, you maybe need that for your own confidence boosting. Every soldier that is hurt tomorrow needs that for a year."

US personnel groups

"I actually applaud it, not because I want to stand up and puff my chest out. But for all the little kids in the audience that then look at you and say 'oh, it's important to honour our veterans'. Adults understand what is going on and what servicemembers are going through, but the youth in America ten years from now may not. The reason you have your freedom of religion and freedom of speech are because of all these people standing up right here."

US personnel groups

Several US personnel had had more mixed experiences of wearing uniform in public. Recruiters in particular had sometimes received a frosty reception. Some had been confronted with public protests, sometimes at military funerals. Though this infuriated many of them they had not let this show, however tempting it may have been; they reminded themselves that the protesters had the military to thank for their freedom.

"When I was a recruiter, one day I was called a baby killer and a man spat in my face. Then the same day a family of five invited me to their table and bought me dinner."

US personnel groups

“Those people who are the naysayers and the people who protest, if it wasn’t for us serving, you wouldn’t have that right, and I’m honoured to give you the right to be a pain in the ass.”

US personnel groups

Despite the overall reticence of UK personnel about suggesting that there was not enough recognition for those currently serving, there was a considerable variation in opinion between Services, ranks and according to length of service. Army and Royal Marines respondents were more likely to think the level of recognition and reward for current personnel was about right than that it was too little, while RAF and – particularly – Royal Navy personnel thought the reverse. Higher ranks thought the level of recognition was “about right” by a 14-point margin, and middle ranks by a 7-point margin. Lower ranks were more likely to think the level of recognition was too little than that it was about right; in the Royal Navy, lower ranks thought there was “too little” recognition by a 24-point margin.

Only 39% of higher ranks thought “there isn’t much recognition for current Service personnel, and there should be more”, compared to 56% of lower ranks (and two thirds of lower ranks in the Royal Navy). Those who had joined in the last five years were more likely to think this (57%) than those who had served more than 20 years (41%). Higher ranks in the Army and Royal Marines were the only groups more likely to think “there is quite a lot of recognition for current Service personnel, and that is as it should be” than to think “there isn’t much recognition for current Service personnel and there should be more”.

“We have to make significant sacrifices throughout our service life, and our families make significant sacrifices in their role supporting us. And we often feel that the rewards for doing that are not quite tangible”.

Royal Marines groups

“I think by nature the Armed Forces are a little bit modest and will say, ‘do we want anything? Oh, don’t worry about us.’”

Royal Navy groups

“We chose to be in the Army. But the fact that people do recognise us is a massive added bonus. It’s a massive added bonus.”

British Army groups

Asked what one extra thing they would like to see society do to reward current members of the Forces, the most frequent answer from UK Service personnel was more or better Forces discounts. Though a quarter of personnel had been offered discounts in shops or other businesses spontaneously while wearing their uniform,

more than two thirds said they often or sometimes asked for a discount if they were not offered one straight away. Just under half of these said this sometimes worked (though only 6% said they were always or nearly always given a discount when they asked), 45% said it rarely worked and 4% said it never did. Officers (63%) were more likely to say they sometimes or always received a discount when they asked than lower ranks (42%).

Several mentioned the official Forces discount scheme, and companies with a policy of offering Forces discounts or services, including car rental companies, some restaurants and motorway service stations, airport departure lounges and programmes like Tickets For Troops. Though some were unabashed about asking for discounts when there was no clear policy, many felt awkward doing so, particularly if there was a queue behind them and the assistant had to check with a manager. One of the things they liked about the American system was that discounts were routine and therefore not a cause of embarrassment.

"To stand at the shop waiting at the till, and say 'do I get a Forces discount please?' is, you know, rubbish. It's common practice in America for a soldier, even if he's British – you go to pay for your goods and you put your ID card on the counter. You don't have to say anything. They just look at it and take the discount off and say 'thank you sir'."

British Army groups

"It would make us feel a bit more welcome, a bit more valued, a small gesture like that."

Royal Marines groups

After discounts, the common theme for suggestions of how society could do more to recognise current personnel was a greater knowledge and understanding of what the Forces do and the sacrifice they make, and for the Forces not to be taken for granted. Next was more attendance at organised events such as remembrance ceremonies and parades, which had been an uplifting experience for many of those who had taken part in them.

A desire to contribute to society and to be invited into existing social structures was the final major theme among suggestions for greater recognition. Nearly three quarters of personnel thought their garrison, station or base was recognised as an important part of the local community (though only a fifth strongly agreed with this), with RAF respondents the most likely to say so. Several observed that by moving frequently, they and particularly their families found it hard to become part of a local community beyond that of the military.

Serving personnel were rather more likely to say that there should be more recognition for former members of the Forces (66% said this) than that there should be more recognition for those still in the Forces (50%). More discounts for former

personnel was the most frequent suggestion for how this could be done, with better opportunities for training and employment another important theme (which will be explored in the next chapter).

Former personnel themselves, however, usually said it was those currently serving who deserved acknowledgment and reward. Many felt strongly that only those who had been injured, or otherwise needed particular help as a result of their service, should get any particular recognition or special consideration from society or the government.

“The UK has somehow got to give recognition to those people who have done a service, whether they’ve been to war or been fortunate enough not to go to war. They have served Queen and country, whatever they have done. There should be something to recognise that, not necessarily giving them things or mollycoddling them, but there needs to be some sort of recognition and we don’t have that. So the perception from civilians is that when you finish in the Service, that’s it. We don’t have veterans.”

Royal Navy groups

“Give it to the lads who are still serving, I say. We’ve left of our own accord.”

Former UK personnel groups

In and out of the Forces: the transition

Motivations for joining

Travel and adventure were the biggest motivation for Service personnel for having joined the Forces (particularly the Army and the Royal Marines), followed by pay and benefits, with job security third. Overall, higher ranks were the most likely to say travel and adventure were the biggest factor: 46% said these were the top attraction, compared to 33% of middle and 31% of lower ranks. Middle and lower ranks were more than twice as likely as officers to say the main attraction was job security.

Though they greatly respected and often admired Service personnel, there was a widespread view among the public that many had joined the Forces because they had few other choices.

"They don't know what else to do so it's a good option, especially if they weren't very good at school."

UK public groups

"It was food and a roof and a job. For those of us who joined in the '80s there weren't a great deal of jobs floating around."

British Army groups

"One of the good things about being in the Army is that it keeps me out of trouble. I would probably be in prison."

British Army groups

For a number of US personnel, the military had also represented a route out of poverty or worse. There was a clear view that joining the Services offered the chance of a better way of life than they would otherwise expect. The opportunity to go to college for free was also a major attraction. Free medical cover was another major benefit. American personnel were also more given to talking about their time in the military in terms of service to the country.

"Most of my siblings are dead, and my cousins are in jail. The discipline told me that yes, I was born in the hood, but that doesn't mean I have to be in the hood in my mind every day. I could have been on the street easily, but I've got one year to go for my bachelor's and that discipline of waking up every day, going to work, going to school. I can thank the Army for that."

US personnel groups

"I joined for a specific reason and that was because my family cannot afford for me to go to college and I know exactly what I want to do, and joining the military was going to get me there. I've done my time, and once I get out I'm going to go to nursing school. The only way I could do it was join the military and get fully paid-off school once I was out."

US personnel groups

"I did join the Army specifically for the educational benefits, and I got the Montgomery GI Bill and the student loan repayment when I was in undergraduate school. I am now two classes from having a Masters degree."

US personnel groups

"When I was a recruiter, I met a gentleman who was homeless. He lived on the roof of a funeral home. I put him in the Army and he's now a sergeant, a medic. He had nothing when I met him, a bag of clothing."

US personnel groups

"To me personally, it's the greatest honour I could ever give my country. I served in combat too, twice. Answered the call. Serving in the military for the United States, I'm part of history."

US personnel groups

"Free medical and dental, you can't beat that anywhere."

US personnel groups

Job satisfaction and the employment package

A clear majority of UK Service personnel rated their job satisfaction as good or very good, though this varied between three quarters of higher and middle and two thirds of lower ranks.

Three quarters said their pay was good or very good, though this varied between Services: 79% of RAF personnel said this compared to 76% of Royal Navy, 73% of Army and 60% of Royal Marines respondents. Middle ranking Army and RAF personnel were the most likely to say their pay was good or very good (85%), and lower ranking Royal Marines the least likely (53%). Satisfaction with pay was greater among those who had served the longest: 65% of those who had joined in the last five years said their pay was good or very good, rising to 82% of those who had served more than 20 years.

Though younger and less senior personnel were the least likely to say their pay was good, it was also clear from the groups that many of them believed it to be better, or at least more regular, than they would expect had they not joined the Forces. Some

noted though, that other public servants – including those, like fire fighters, whom they had to cover for when they went on strike – were paid a good deal more than they were.

“If I did my job in the outside world I wouldn’t get anywhere near the amount of money I currently get. I think a lot of people take that for granted. And the opportunities we get for things like expeditions and adventurous training are second to none.”

RAF groups

“Fire fighters were on strike, looking for a significant pay rise, and their job was being covered by squaddies who didn’t earn anything like what they did. Service people were talking to them on the picket line: ‘You earn how much? Four days on and four days off?’ They all came back and put their notice in. We lost half the ship’s company to go and be firemen.”

Royal Navy groups

Longer serving personnel would also argue that while the pay may not be very high in itself, once cheaper housing, a good pension and other benefits were taken into account the overall package was competitive (though assessments of their housing ranged from “amazing”, for new single living accommodation, to “very poor”). Three quarters of personnel said in the poll that they thought their overall package was good or very good.

“For me as an air trafficker, my pay is about half what it would be in civilian street. Then I look at all the other things that are associated with it, and I don’t want to work in civilian street. I’d rather do it in the military.”

RAF groups

“I have moved jobs every two years, I’ve served on three or four different continents, on operations in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, New Zealand, everywhere. Training and organisation, doing intelligence work, and that sheer scale of variety I don’t think is available to most people in civilian street.”

British Army groups

“Alright, you get stuck in a jungle in Belize, but then you get on a bus four weeks later and you’re off to Cancun for a week. I don’t know anyone who’s been to Cancun, certainly not when they were 19 years old”.

British Army groups

"For us to have the equivalent lifestyle with the housing, the medical, the dental, all the physical stuff and the benefits and everything else, I think the ballpark is about £60 or £70k. Now if I left the Army tomorrow and went to a company and said 'I want a job paying £65,000 because I've got transferable skill's, he'd probably fall off his chair laughing."

British Army groups

A number of personnel said one of the things they valued most about the Forces, and the thing they would most miss when they left, was the ethos and camaraderie of Service life. They emphasised that the values they were officially expected to live by – courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment – really were practised. This was perhaps what most set them apart from civilian organisations.

"Commitment, courage, discipline, respect, integrity, loyalty. It's not just the words, it's what they truly mean. If you were to have a marking sheet and ask, 'do I see these things being displayed?', not just in Libya and Afghanistan but around this very establishment, you will see it."

Royal Navy groups

"I lost my husband two years ago and it was very, very difficult but the Service was stellar. It would have been for anyone in my circumstances. I find it hard to imagine another organisation that would have closed around me as it did, and gave me the support that it did. I think, at times like that, you can't put a price on them."

RAF groups

"In my area I deal with loads of civilian organisations, and even getting them to turn up on time to meetings – they're typically an hour late, and it's 'yeah, sorry about that'. We would never do that."

British Army groups

Despite the broad satisfaction with the employment package, there was a feeling among personnel that the overall balance between the sacrifices they made (including personal risk and time away from family) and what they received in return (including pay, time off, and things like sport and adventurous training opportunities) was, over time, being eroded. Half said this balance had got worse in recent years, while 41% said it had stayed the same. Only 8% said it had improved.

In focus groups personnel said there were a number of factors involved, including changes to pensions, allowances, tighter budgets for discretionary activities such as sport and expeditions, less job security, and a higher operational tempo meaning

more pressure on individuals' time, all of which amounted to less compensation for the stresses on family life.

"I went to Northern Ireland when my oldest boy was three months old. I came back home, he was ten months and didn't know who I was, just screamed and ran back to his mum. It was months before I could pick him up without him crying and that's devastating as a dad."

British Army groups

"A lot of marriages go by the by because they can't stand the Army pressure. When you're in support groups, you may deploy to Sierra Leone. On the Friday afternoon, everyone is going away for the weekend. At 2 o'clock, the notice comes. Within 36 hours, you're deployed to another country".

British Army groups

"If you look at the scales and say, 'there's your offer and there's your sacrifice', I think they're out of balance at the moment."

British Army groups

"The packages aren't what they used to be and they're getting worse. The quarterly charges went up last year and we're on a pay freeze and there's higher inflation. The Continuity of Education Allowance is getting more difficult. So the benefits are still there but they will become less and less. So is your house a good deal at the moment? Yes, it is. Is it as good as it was last year? No, it isn't. Are we going to end up in a better position in two years' time? No, we're not."

British Army groups

Problems resulting from being in the Forces

Nearly three quarters (73%) of Service personnel currently posted overseas said they had experienced companies refusing to deliver to British Forces Post Office addresses in the last five years. More than a third (35%) of all personnel said companies had refused to deliver to them at BFPO addresses.

"There are large swathes of companies in the UK who refuse to send goods to BFPO addresses. It's as good as a UK postcode, but because it hasn't got a postcode, they say 'we're not doing that'. It's in ignorance. You ask them to send something via BFPO, and they say, 'well that's international'. It isn't."

British Army groups

A third of lower ranks in the Army, and just over a quarter of all personnel, said they had been refused a mortgage, loan or credit card in the last five years as a result of serving in the Forces, and nearly a fifth said they had trouble getting mobile phone contract. Several personnel in the focus groups explained that their frequent changes of address counted against them on their credit record, even though they were perfectly solvent. Even if they owned a house, this did not help if they were not currently living in it because they were posted elsewhere.

"It sounds like such a simple thing, not being able to be credit checked, but it means you can't even get a mobile phone contract, never mind a mortgage."

British Army groups

"When you look at credit scoring, they see you are moving every eighteen months to two years and the question is always, 'do you own the house that you live in?' And even though I've got another house, I don't own the house that I live in. So that goes against me."

RAF groups

One third said that life in the Forces had meant it was difficult for a spouse or partner to find employment. Relatively few (17%) said that within the last five years they had found themselves at the back of the queue for public services when moving to a new area, and 12% said they had had difficulty finding a school place for a child when moving. Several observed that things seemed to be improving when it came to accessing public services, and that local authorities and others seemed to have a better understanding of the particular circumstances of Service personnel than they once did.

"Things are dramatically better. If you now go down to your local education authority and explain the situation, they will get your child into the best school they can, and so on. If you go to your local health clinic and say, 'I've just moved here, sorry, I know there's a waiting list', they can help you out. So society is being told and things are much better than they were."

Former personnel groups

Service personnel generally welcomed the principle of the Armed Forces Covenant and felt its aims were very good (though several lower ranks in particular were unaware of it). Some were more sceptical, saying they would reserve judgment until it was clear what, if anything had changed as a result. Others said the Covenant looked to them like a political device designed to suggest support for the Forces without committing to any tangible action, at a time when many personnel felt their employment conditions were being eroded rather than enhanced.

"We used to be second class citizens. The military covenant is going to square that away."

British Army groups

"If you're moving back from Germany to the UK, try getting a dentist. Try and get your kids into school. It's a real slog, a real struggle. The AF Covenant is there to try and change this."

British Army groups

"It's long on political goodwill and short on material promises and undertakings."

Royal Navy groups

"I'm a little bit cynical about the whole covenant process because it can be used as a political tool. I won't really sign up to it until it's gone through and we know exactly what we've got. Sometimes they promise things and then shift a little bit. It's got to be made law so we can hold them to it."

Royal Marines groups

American Service personnel were rather baffled by the idea of being disadvantaged in terms of public service provision or the services available from companies ("we have federal laws against that!"). If anything the reverse was true, as companies and public agencies were eager to show their support for the military.

"If you do something like that, you have a war on your hands. If you deny one military person healthcare or schooling or whatever, you'll have full force."

US personnel groups

"I think the US has nipped that in the bud with the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. So we're able to get out of contracts if we're deploying or moving, things of that nature. So I think the government has taken steps to prevent that kind of discrimination or disadvantage."

US personnel groups

Expectations and concerns about the transition to civilian life

45% of Service personnel said one of their biggest concerns about leaving the Forces was finances and budgeting. This varied according to seniority: 33% of officers were worried about this, compared to 49% of lower ranks, including 53% of lower ranks in the Army.

Just over a third (35%) were worried about finding decent housing, including 41% of lower ranks and 45% of lower ranks in the Army. Just under a quarter (24%) said they were concerned about dealing with non-military life. Just over a fifth (21%) said they were worried about a lack of variety or boredom, or a lack of camaraderie and community spirit.

By far the most widespread concern, though was finding a good job. More than four fifths (81%) named it as one of their top three concerns about leaving the Forces. Only just over a third (35%) said they had a clear idea about what area of work they would go into when they left the Forces, though this rose to 41% in the middle and lower ranks of the Royal Marines, many of whom intended to go into maritime security. Only 27% agreed “it will be easy for me to find a good job when I leave the military” (and only 4% agreed strongly), though this was higher (39%) among officers.

Asked in the poll about their expectations of future civilian jobs, personnel were more likely to think their job satisfaction, pay, other benefits, job security and overall package would be worse than that they would be better. More than two thirds of personnel said they expected to have to take a pay cut on leaving the military, with middle ranks (82%) the most likely to say this. Just under half (48%) of those who had joined in the last five years expected to have to take a pay cut, compared to 81% of those who had served 20 years or more.

Expectations about future job satisfaction were related to seniority. Lower ranks thought their job satisfaction would be better outside the services by a 9-point margin, while middle and higher ranks thought it would be worse, by 12 and 21 points respectively. Higher ranks in the Royal Marines were the most likely to think their job satisfaction would be worse outside the Forces.

“It scares me to death, getting out of the Army. I see my father-in-law, for example, in a mundane, normal civvy job and I look at him and think, I’ve had diversity, variety for 25 years. Doing that scares me to death.”

British Army groups

More than half of Service personnel thought (55%) their pay would be worse in their future civilian role; less than a third (31%) thought it would be better. RAF and Royal Navy respondents were the most likely to think their future pay outside the Forces would be worse. Royal Marines were unusual in thinking their pay outside the Forces was likely to be better, largely because of they expected their maritime security jobs to be very lucrative.

Overall, middle ranks were the most pessimistic about their future pay prospects outside the Services. 71% of middle ranks thought their pay would be worse, compared to 54% of officers and 49% of lower ranks.

The longer personnel had served, the more likely they were to think their pay outside the Services would be worse. Those who had joined within the last five years were quite evenly divided (40% thought their pay would be better outside, 42% thought it would be worse), while those who had served more than 20 years were pessimistic by a margin of 50 points (20% better, 70% worse).

This greater pessimism among longer serving personnel reflected a fear that employers would be less inclined to risk giving substantial jobs to people of their age, with no commercial experience (and some former personnel confirmed that they had found this to be the case). Most said they understood why employers might think this way, and that they would do the same in their position.

"We don't have the experience. People can patronise us all they want about transferable skills but companies haven't got the money to take the risk on someone who has not got the experience, so they are not going to give you that mid-management position".

British Army groups

"I know a lot of people who have gone for jobs and found employers are not interested. When I get out I will be 44. That is very old to be starting a fresh job, a fresh career. At no point will they be able to offer me the financial stability I'd need for the commitments I've got."

British Army groups

"Human resources professionals choose the middle of the bell curve, and if you've done eight years in the Army you're not the middle of the bell curve."

UK former personnel groups

"We are selling a broadly transferable skill set and the ability to assimilate any job role rapidly, because that's what we do on a two-year basis. You try and tell that to somebody and they say 'oh, you haven't got experience of this computer system'; so you say, 'well that's OK, give me a day and I'll be up to speed', and they say, 'well actually, we've taken on this mediocre guy who's worked here before'."

UK former personnel groups

Current and former personnel said considerable educational opportunities were available to them in the Forces, though the recent operational tempo had made it harder to take full advantage of them. They also acknowledged that once they had decided to leave, personnel received a good deal of help and advice on making the

transition to civilian life – something that they appreciated would not be available from most employers.

“The Army is better now at structuring soldiers for a future life. There are transition workshops now that they didn’t have in the past.”

British Army groups

“The Career Transition Partnerships are very good. They give you an adviser. You don’t get that in every job, so you are supported.”

British Army groups

Though the Forces helped departing personnel with the transition, many thought the biggest barrier would be the attitudes of employers, the great majority of whom would inevitably know very little about the Services.

One fear was that employers would think former personnel would be institutionalised, or otherwise difficult to work with, after several years in the Forces. There was a feeling that employers may assume wrongly that the need to follow orders meant personnel were unable to think for themselves. Some current and former personnel had evidence to support this from their own experience.

“I think the idea is that you try to put people through a package that lasts depending on how long you’ve served, which is fair enough, but you’re not going to be able to translate everything you’ve done in that space of time to something the rest of the world completely understands.”

UK former personnel groups

“I think some people think we’d be difficult to work with. They’d think we can be very autocratic. There might be some concern out there that we wouldn’t actually help make a team.”

British Army groups

“I found it quite difficult because there was a kind of stigma attached. I trained as a fridge and air conditioning engineer, and went for twelve interviews. Every single one of them said ‘you’re going to find it hard transitioning to civvy street’. I said to each one, ‘I’ll work for you for a month unpaid’, but none of them took me up on it.”

UK former personnel groups

“I was on a course once, an NGO was presenting. An Army engineer asked a question: ‘I’m looking at leaving, I’m skilled in petroleum and I’d like to work for your type of organisation. Do you recruit military?’ And she just said, ‘No, we like people who can think independently’.”

British Army groups

"One of my first interviews was horrendous. The guy just kept on asking me if I'd be able to speak to females in my new job because I must have only spoken to guys. I found that quite shocking".

UK former personnel groups

Three quarters of personnel agreed with the statement "I have transferable skills which will be useful in a civilian job (though this ranged between 86% of higher, 78% of middle and 70% of lower ranks). 71% said that during their time in the Forces they had gained at least one recognised civilian qualification which would help them find a job when they left.

At the same time, more than half (58%) of personnel agreed "many employers do not understand what we do in the military so might not give us a chance." Only just over half agreed that "most employers recognise the skills of ex-Service people, and are keen to employ them."

This concern was also a recurring theme in the focus group discussions. Though they had plenty of skills to offer future employers – including planning, logistics, leadership, organisation and project management among many others, as well characteristics like discipline, reliability, adaptability, ability to operate under stress, and the values that come from having worked in a "culture of responsibility" – they often feared that employers would not understand what their role had been or recognise the value of their experience. Although employers might credit them with generic qualities, they might not see them in terms of more specific or tangible expertise. (Since even their friends do not know what they do, one observed, employers have no chance).

Several mentioned companies, including Tesco, which recognised the value of former Service personnel and made a particular effort to recruit them, but most thought this was still relatively rare and that employers more generally would be less certain about their qualities.

"I talk to a number of civvy friends and they describe what their managers are like, and they're not managers. We have learned how to manage people, how to motivate people to do as we wish, whereas if you take a bank manager, he understands the systems in place for running a bank but has no idea how to manage and motivate people. That's one skill we have in spades, but it's mapping it across to a civilian employer. They don't understand that your rank as a WO1 means you can manage people."

British Army groups

"If a 25 year-old section commander leaves the Army, that is a highly-trained, very effective leader, mentor and manager. But he's 25. Tell me how many managers in civvy street are 25, have led people in dangerous situations, who have had to crisis manage, project manage, deal with the people themselves and all the baggage they bring, and do that standing on his head without worrying about it, and all in line with the Super Six? You will not find a manager on civvy street on the same wage with the same experience. These young people of ours are superb managers and leaders."

British Army groups

"When I joined, five people in one year fired their weapons. Now a young soldier knows he's going to get into a massive scrap. He knows he could die. The challenge is extraordinary. What the Army is putting back into civilian life from now on are people with extraordinary qualities."

UK former personnel groups

"Employers only see us from what they watch on TV. One of my sergeants manages £50 million of tanks. A fleet worth fifty million quid. How many guys in other organisations at that level would be doing a job like that? If he was managing fifty million quid's worth of assets out there, he'd be on a much bigger salary. In the Army it's 'Crack on Sergeant X, this is your job'."

British Army groups

"In Air Engineering, on your first complement job you'll have God knows how many million pounds worth of aircraft and a hundred engineers. There isn't really an equivalent role on civvy street, but that sort of experience, dealing with that level of money and manpower, and importance in terms of operational capability, is incomparable."

Royal Navy groups

"If you're an officer people think you've got leadership qualities. Most people outside don't realise that the leadership is all done by the senior ranks, your Sergeant Majors and so on."

Former UK personnel groups

"I think they see people in the Army as hardworking and going the extra mile or whatever, but don't really understand what skills an Army officer might be able to bring to their employment."

Former UK personnel groups

"I called an employer once and got a girl on the phone and she said 'what do you do for a living?' I said, I'm a Section Commander in the Royal Welsh Regiment. She said, 'well, unless you plan on shooting people in civvy street you're not a lot of use to us.'"

British Army groups

“One guy was telling me that an employer asked him why he thought he’d be a good manager. He was trying to explain that he had commanded 30 guys on the ground in Afghanistan, but the guy just didn’t get the concept of how it transferred over.”

British Army groups

“Employers should have access to a CV translator, a line they can call and say ‘I’ve got a CV here, the bloke says he’s been a sapper in 35 Regiment, what does that mean? What could he have done?’”

Former UK personnel groups

“The biggest misunderstanding about military people is that we all go out and shoot people. We don’t. There is a vast array of jobs out there that people aren’t told about. Until they understand what we can bring, and what our experiences can contribute to them, they’re never going to change their opinion, are they?”

RAF groups

Despite the help and advice they received on making the transition to civilian life, which many said was useful, younger personnel in particular were naturally reluctant to promote themselves even though they had experience and responsibility that could not be matched by most of their civilian contemporaries.

“We put ourselves down slightly. We probably don’t sell ourselves sufficiently because we don’t really understand what we’re selling when we sell ourselves. There’s a whole new world out there that we don’t fully understand.”

Former UK personnel groups

“People leaving the Army massively undersell themselves. Somebody who’s done seven years, leaving as a full Corporal who’s commanded a section of eight men, will get out of the Army and think ‘I can’t work in management because I don’t know anything about management.’ My wife had a £40,000 a year job for the county council in charge of four people, and that was considered middle management. I was thinking, ‘four people?’”

British Army groups

Overall, nearly two thirds of personnel said that when they left they expected to be “competing for jobs against younger people who will be prepared to work for less.” Middle ranks (76%) were the most likely to think this, and Army personnel (72%)

were more likely to do so than those in other Services. Even a majority of those who had served five years or less (59%) expected this to be the case, rising to 74% of those who had served 16 to 20 years.

Some infantry personnel expected that after a few years in the Army they would effectively be starting their careers from scratch, competing with younger, cheaper labour, possibly even for unskilled jobs.

"I joined the Army when I was 16 and I've got mates who started bricklaying when they were 16. Now if I were to leave the Army now and do a bricklaying course, which I know nothing about at the minute, whereas they've been doing it nearly seven years, they'd get the job every time."

British Army groups

*"If we leave, there's nothing else we can do. We're just infantry soldiers, it's not like being an engineer or something. The only thing we've got is security jobs, and if you don't want to do that you're f****d."*

British Army groups

"It's shopping trolleys for me".

Royal Navy groups

"The ones I've seen are mainly management jobs, and I just look and think 'nah, they'd never employ me for that because I haven't got any qualifications.' I'd probably sweep the warehouse. That's probably the best thing they'd get out of me."

British Army groups

"You could have done ten years or 22 years. You're in the same position as that eighteen year-old school leaver fighting for the same jobs. The only difference is you've got reliability, timekeeping, you look smarter. That's the only difference between us going out and getting a job and someone leaving school and getting a job."

Royal Marines groups

"If I had started out as some scrote in a factory, by now I would be a supervisor or something because of the time I'd done. So if I left now I'd be starting at the bottom, unable to pay the mortgage, probably unable to pay the rent, with a wife and kids to support."

British Army groups

In the US, middle and upper ranking personnel were cautiously optimistic that they would find good jobs without too much trouble – not least because they had been through “the premier leadership institution in America” – though some thought they may need to take a small pay cut in the short term. Younger personnel tended to have a different view of their prospects to that of their British counterparts. Far from feeling they would be taking a step back in their careers when they left, they often said they thought the military “sets you up for success” (though some emphasised that this was as much to do with an individual’s attitude as what was provided for him).

Part of their confidence came from the knowledge that tax relief was available to American companies employing veterans, and that veterans had an advantage in applying for federal government jobs, especially if they were disabled.

“If you tap into the available resources and you take advantage of them, you can set yourself up.”

US personnel groups

“You won’t hire us to make billions, but you will to lead 200 minions. You don’t care if I know how to build a semiconductor or whatnot, but you know I have gone to the best school in America that will allow me to motivate 19 or 21 year olds to do, in some instances, hard manual labour for long hours.”

US personnel groups

“It gives you confidence, and self-sustaining ability. You could drop me in Korea with no map and maybe \$20 in my hand, and say ‘you’re going to live here for a year’, and I’d be like, ‘got it!’ Then you can come back and pick me up in a year, and I will probably have a nice apartment and a side job. We can survive anywhere. I lived in Kosovo in a wooden hut for six months, and I was still in college, still paid my bills.”

US personnel groups

“I deal with a lot of commercial companies every day, like Reed Chevrolet, and each and every day Mr Reed asks me if I’m ready to go work for him. He asks me every day. ‘Hey Omar, are you ready to come to work for me?’ ‘No sir, I’ve still got a little bit to go’.”

US personnel groups

“I’m going to be a bat out of hell. I already know exactly what I want to do when I get out, and I can’t wait to interview with a civilian company, because I know what they need, and it’s me.”

US personnel groups

"You could still avoid all these opportunities if you chose. You're given a whole bunch of tools but if you leave them in the toolbox they're not going to help you. You see down-and-outs who say 'I'm a veteran'. Well then, get your happy little ass a job. Get up, it's embarrassing."

US personnel groups

The UK personnel who were most confident in their career prospects on leaving the Forces were those who had very specific skills and qualifications directly relevant to a civilian industry.

"I have a logistics background, that's where my degree and my Master's is. I would go into logistics and probably have a similar salary to what I'm on now. Dare I say, I wouldn't be doing the hours I am now, and I'd have in many respects less responsibility and more time with my family."

British Army groups

Despite the widespread pessimism about their immediate career prospects on leaving the Forces, personnel rejected the idea that they should be regarded as a priority or should get any special consideration from employers. They emphasised that they wanted to be given a fair opportunity and to be treated on merit, like any other applicant.

"What if you're a civvy and you go for a job, and they say 'he's been to Afghn so he's getting the job'? How are you going to feel? To have that kind of advantage would be selfish."

British Army groups

"I don't want to be judged by the fact that I am Flight Lieutenant Bloggs. I don't see why the fact that I was in the Services should have any bearing on my ability to do the job, other than the skills I have picked up in my time in the Service. If we start going down that route, we are going to have members of the public turn against us."

RAF groups

How employers and the public see former Service personnel

Most of the public have a high opinion of those who have served in the Forces. However, more than nine out of ten said in the poll that it is either quite common (57%) or very common (34%) for former personnel to have some kind of some kind

of physical, emotional or mental health problem as a result of their service. Women (42%) were more likely to think these problems were very common than men (26%), and younger people were more likely to think so than older people.

Many members of the public also thought former personnel often found it very hard to adjust to civilian life or organise themselves independently. There was a widespread belief among the public that former personnel were unusually likely to become homeless or go to prison. Some in the Forces shared this view, though others argued that this probably had more to do with the particular circumstances or backgrounds of the individuals in question than with their Service experience. There was some concern, though, that there was no mechanism for staying in touch with former personnel once they had left or for checking on their welfare.

"They used to say that one in four selling the Big Issue are ex-soldiers. Something like 9,000 of the current custodial population were ex-Service people. When they leave, they just fall off the radar. They're not in the public eye any more, they're not in uniform. They're not in the club and they get forgotten about, they have to fend for themselves."

British Army groups

"I think every one will have some kind of mental disorder when they leave. Parts of their personality will have changed as a result of doing their job."

UK public groups

"I had someone who had been in the Army come and work with me for about two hours. He was a fruitcake."

UK public groups

"Everything is done for you so they struggle when they come out. They're a fish out of water. There are more marital problems, and a lot of mental health issues."

UK public groups

"You can't be a killer one second and working in M&S the next".

UK public groups

"I know a bloke who didn't pay his bills, like Council Tax, because it just didn't occur to him. He lost his flat eventually."

UK public groups

"They don't get out of bed unless there's someone shouting 'get out of bed!'"

UK public groups

Just under half of the public thought former personnel would find it no easier or harder than most people to find a new job outside the military. Officers were thought as likely to find it easier than most people to find a new job (29%) than to find it harder (30%). However, the public were much more likely to think other ranks would find it harder than most people to find a new job (39%) than to think they would find it easier (15%).

The American public were more likely than UK respondents to think that both officers and other ranks would find it easier than most to find a new job, and less likely to think they would find it harder.

More than half of employers in small and medium sized companies said they often or sometimes struggled to find candidates with the skills and qualities they needed. Apart from specialist staff, they found management and skilled manual roles hardest to fill. The ability to come up with creative solutions to problems, communications skills, a positive attitude to work and people management skills were the hardest attributes to find after specific technical qualifications.

Asked whether they thought a former member of the Armed Forces was likely to display a range of attributes, employers thought all of them – with the exception of “directly relevant experience” – were more likely to be found in former personnel than applicants in general. By some distance, the attributes they were most likely to agree would be found disproportionately among ex-Forces applicants were the ability to follow instructions, ability to work well under stress, and time management. Majorities also thought communication skills and a positive attitude to work were more likely to be displayed by former personnel than applicants in general.

However, when it came to people management skills, technical qualifications, ability to make decisions independently, and ability to come up with creative solutions to problems, most employers said they thought former personnel were no more, or even less likely than candidates generally to display the attribute. Less than a third (32%) thought former Service personnel were more likely than most people to be able to come up with creative solutions to problems.

Employers’ perceptions of officers differed from their view of other ranks. By small margins, they thought officers more likely to have technical qualifications and ability, a positive attitude to work, and the ability to work well under stress (though the figures for the last two of these were very high for both). By much bigger margins, officers were thought more likely than other ranks to have communications skills and to be able to use their initiative. By bigger margins still, they were thought more likely to be able to come up with creative solutions to problems, to have people management skills, and to be able to make decisions independently. A quarter of employers said they thought it unlikely that other ranks would possess these last two attributes, while only 5% said the same of officers.

One quarter of SME employers thought it unlikely that other ranks would have people management skills or the ability to make decisions independently.

Poll of small and medium sized companies

Overall, 78% of employers regarded those who had spent several years in the Forces as “capable, experienced individuals with a lot to offer”; only 10% said they thought of them more as “aggressive, institutionalised or likely to have problems” (though a further 11% said they did not know which statement best summed up their view.

Asked whether, if they received a very large number of applications for a job, a CV showing an applicant had spent several years in the Forces would make them more or less inclined to invite the candidate for interview, more than half of employers insisted (even when pressed) that it would make no difference. Just over a third said Forces experience would make them more inclined to progress the candidate’s application, while only 4% said it would make them less inclined. When asked to say in their own words why Forces experience would encourage them to progress an application, more than half said the candidate would be “disciplined”, with 30% saying they would be reliable, loyal or able to follow instructions. Only 13% mentioned training, experience or skills.

Survey of UK Service personnel

A survey of 9,106 Service personnel was conducted between November 2011 and January 2012. A sample of 25,000 was selected by the Defence Analytical Services Agency and results were weighted to be representative of the Armed Forces as a whole. For each survey completed, £5 was pledged to four Service charities.

SECTION A: THE PUBLIC AND WIDER SOCIETY

1. Overall, how do you think the following groups feel about the Forces?

	Very positive	Quite positive	ALL POSITIVE	Quite negative	Very negative	ALL NEGATIVE
The general public	26%	65%	92%	6%	1%	7%
Civilian employers	11%	66%	77%	10%	2%	12%
The government	17%	48%	65%	23%	6%	29%
The media	20%	59%	79%	12%	3%	15%

- Higher ranks were more likely to think the general public had a positive view of the Forces (97%) than lower ranks (89%). 35% of higher ranks thought the general public's view was "very positive", compared to 31% of middle ranks and 22% of lower ranks.
- Royal Navy personnel were the least likely to think the government had a positive view of the Forces (56%, compared to 63% of RAF, 68% of Army and 70% of Royal Marines personnel).
- Higher ranks were more likely to think the media had a positive view of the Forces (87%) than lower ranks (75%).

2. Over the past five years, do you think the relationship between the Armed Forces and the following groups has got better, worse, or stayed the same?

	Has got better	Stayed the same	Has got worse
The general public	75%	18%	5%
Civilian employers	27%	55%	6%
The government	19%	42%	35%
The media	46%	41%	9%

- The longer personnel had served, the more likely they were to say they thought the relationship with the general public had improved. 62% of those who had been in the Forces less than five years said the relationship had got better, rising to 85% of those who had served for more than 20 years.
- Royal Navy personnel were the least likely to say the relationship had improved with the public (67%, compared to 77% of Army).

3. Over the next five years, do you think the relationship between the Armed Forces and the following groups will get better, worse, or stay the same?

	Will get better	Will stay the same	Will get worse
The general public	28%	52%	13%
Civilian employers	16%	59%	12%
The government	9%	44%	39%
The media	15%	60%	16%

- Army personnel were the most optimistic that the relationship with the general public would continue to improve. 31% said they expected the relationship to get better over the next five years, compared to 25% of Royal Navy, 23% of Royal Marines and 22% of RAF respondents). Lower ranks were nearly three times as likely to think the relationship with the public would improve over the next five years (34%) as higher ranks (12%).
- Higher ranks stood out for being twice as likely to think the relationship with the public would get worse (24%) as to think it would get better (12%).
- Royal Navy personnel were the most pessimistic about the Services' relationship with the government. 45% thought the relationship would get worse, compared to 41% of RAF, 37% of Army and 34% of Royal Marines respondents.
- Overall, 55% of higher ranks thought the relationship with the government would get worse, compared to 43% of middle and 33% of lower ranks.
- Higher ranks were also the most pessimistic about the Services' relationship with the media. 26% thought it would get worse over the next five years, twice as high as among lower ranks (though nearly two thirds, 64%, of higher ranks thought the relationship would stay the same).

4. How well informed do you think the following groups are about day-to-day life in the Forces?

	Very well informed	Quite well informed	Quite badly informed	Very badly informed
The general public	1%	28%	51%	17%
Civilian employers	1%	30%	46%	12%
The government	11%	34%	34%	17%
The media	4%	36%	41%	13%

5. Which of the following do you think best describes the way the public feel towards Service personnel?
[Please choose up to three]

Supportive	64%	Grateful	27%	Intimidated	8%
Proud	51%	Admiring	25%	Condescending	5%
Respectful	47%	Indifferent	15%	Jealous	3%
Sympathetic	34%	Wary	13%	Afraid	2%

- Overall, lower ranks were more likely to think people felt “wary” of Service personnel (15%). This was most pronounced among Royal Marines, 21% of whose lower ranks said they felt the public were wary of them.
- Royal Navy personnel were more likely than respondents as a whole to think the public were “indifferent” to Service personnel (21%). Higher ranks in the Navy were the most likely to think this (24%); they were twice as likely to do so as their Army counterparts (12%).

6. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	AGREE		DISAGREE	
	Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly
The public support the Armed Forces, even if they don't agree with the operations they are sent on	20%	60%	15%	3%
It is clear that the public are grateful for the military's role in keeping the country safe	15%	57%	21%	3%
Recent "fly on the wall" documentaries are having a positive impact on what the public think of the Forces	24%	56%	9%	1%
Criticism of the Forces by the media is usually unfair, and based on exaggeration or false stories	20%	48%	21%	2%
Charities, for example Help for Heroes, are having a positive impact on public perceptions of the Forces	52%	43%	3%	*

- Army personnel were the most likely to think "it is clear that the public are grateful for the military's role in keeping the country safe" (77%). This fell to 64% in the Royal Navy. Only 60% of Royal Navy and RAF higher ranks agreed, compared to 70% of Army and 73% of Royal Marines higher ranks.
- Overall, lower ranks (70%) were more likely than higher ranks (61%) to think "criticism of the Forces by the media is usually unfair, and based on exaggeration or false stories". Royal Marines lower ranks (74%) were the most likely of all to think this.

7. How often do you wear your uniform in public in the UK in everyday situations (not ceremonial occasions)?

Often	15%	Sometimes	24%	Rarely	37%	Never	24%
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- Higher ranks (50%) were more likely than middle (43%) or lower ranks (34%) to say they often or sometimes wore their uniform in public. Only 9% of Royal Marines said they often or sometimes did so.

8. If you rarely or never wear your uniform in public in the UK, is that because...

My routine means I am rarely in uniform outside work	46%
I prefer not to stand out as a member of the Forces	35%
I am encouraged/instructed not to do so	18%

9. When you have worn your uniform in public in everyday situations, has the overall reception you receive from the public been...

Positive	34%	Neutral	62%	Negative	3%
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10. Since you joined, has the public reaction to you as a member of the Armed Forces...

Improved	53%	Stayed the same	41%	Got worse	6%
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- Longer serving personnel were the most likely to say public reaction to them as a member of the Forces had improved over the course of their career. 45% of those who had joined in the last five years said public reaction had improved in that time. This rose to 55% of those who had served 11 to 15 years, and 63% of those who had served 16 years or more.

11. Have any of the following things happened to you while wearing your uniform in public in the UK in the last five years?

Strangers coming up to offer thanks / support	56%
Strangers offering to buy drinks, or similar	29%
Spontaneous offers of discounts in shops or businesses	26%
Strangers shouting abuse	21%
Being refused service in pubs, hotels or elsewhere	18%
Violence or attempted violence	6%

- Army personnel (64%) were slightly more likely than those from other Services (60% of Royal Marines, 44% of RAF and Royal Navy respondents) to have experienced strangers coming up to offer thanks or support. They were also the most likely to have received spontaneous offers of discounts (32%, compared to 17% of Royal Navy and 20% of RAF and Royal Marines personnel).
- However, Army personnel (22%) and Royal Marines (25%) were the most likely to have been refused service in pubs, hotels or elsewhere – around twice the level for the RAF (12%) and Royal Navy (13%).

12. Do you ever ask for a Forces discount in shops etc if you are not offered one straight away?

Often	27%	Sometimes	41%	Rarely	18%	Never	12%
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13. If you often or sometimes ask – how often do you actually get a discount when you ask for one?

Always or nearly always	6%	Sometimes	44%	Rarely	45%	Never	4%
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- Higher ranks (63%) and middle ranks (62%) were more likely to say they always or sometimes received a discount when they asked for one than lower ranks (42%). 57% of Army lower ranks said they rarely or never received a discount when they asked, compared to 37% of higher ranks.

14. Have you personally had any of the following problems as a result of serving in the Forces in the last five years?

Companies refusing to deliver to BFPO addresses	35%
Spouse/partner finding it difficult to get employment	33%
Being refused a mortgage, loan or credit card	27%
Difficulty getting a mobile phone contract	19%
Being at the back of the queue for public services (e.g. doctors, dentists) when moving to a new area	17%
Difficulty finding a school place for a child when moving to a new area	12%

- 73% of personnel currently posted overseas said they had experienced companies refusing to deliver to BFPO addresses in the last five years.
- Lower ranks (29%), particularly in the Army (33%), were more likely than higher ranks (18%) to say they had been refused a mortgage, loan or credit card in the last five years as a result of serving in the Forces.

SECTION B: TRANSITION INTO CIVILIAN LIFE

15. Which of the following are your biggest concerns about returning to civilian life? [Choose up to 3]

Finding a good job	81%	Lack of variety / boredom	21%	Returning to family life	7%
Finances / budgeting	45%	Lack of community spirit/camaraderie	21%	Other	2%
Finding decent housing	35%	Getting healthcare for a service-related injury / condition	20%	None	7%
Dealing with non-military life	24%	Social life	8%		

- Lower ranks (49%) were considerably more likely to be concerned about finances and budgeting than higher ranks (33%). More than half (53%) of Army lower ranks were worried about this aspect of returning to civilian life.
- 41% of lower ranks (including 45% in the Army) were concerned about finding decent housing when leaving the Services, compared to 22% of higher ranks.

16. Please say if either of the following applies to you.

I am being made redundant	2%	I believe I may be made redundant but haven't heard yet	11%	Neither	84%
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17. Do you have a clear idea about what area of work you will go into when you leave the Armed Forces?

Yes	35%	No	65%
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- Middle and lower ranks in the Royal Marines were the most likely to say they had a clear idea of what they would do after leaving the Services. 37% of those with a clear idea in lower ranks said they planned to go into security.
- Overall, those who had served for longer were if anything less likely to have a clear idea what they would do when they left. 38% of those who had joined in the last five years had a clear idea, compared to 32% of those who had served 11 to 15 years, 33% of those who had served 16 to 20 years and 34% of those who had been in the Forces more than 20 years.

18. How optimistic are you about the following aspects of your potential future role on leaving the Forces? Do you think they will be better, worse, or about the same compared to the Forces?

<i>These things will be...</i>	Much better outside	A bit better outside	TOTAL BETTER	A bit worse outside	Much worse outside	TOTAL WORSE	Net Better – Worse
Job satisfaction	12%	26%	38%	32%	8%	40%	-2%
Pay	12%	20%	31%	38%	17%	55%	-24%
Other benefits of the job	6%	17%	23%	37%	24%	61%	-38%
Job security	2%	6%	8%	42%	36%	78%	-70%
The overall package	7%	22%	29%	36%	15%	51%	-22%

- Army personnel were marginally more likely to think their job satisfaction would be better outside the Services (+3%), as were Royal Navy respondents (+1%). Those in the RAF (-10%) and the Royal Marines (-12%) were more pessimistic. Optimism about comparative future job satisfaction was inversely related to seniority. Lower ranks thought their job satisfaction would be better outside the Services by a 9-point margin. Middle ranks thought it would be worse by 12 points, and higher ranks by 21 points. Higher ranks in the Royal Marines thought their future job satisfaction would be worse by a 25-point margin.

- While respondents overall were pessimistic about their comparative future pay by a 24-point margin (with the RAF pessimistic by 27 points and the Royal Navy by 29 points), Royal Marines were more likely to think their pay would be better outside the Services, by a 9-point margin.
- Overall, middle ranks were the most pessimistic about their future pay prospects outside the Services, thinking their pay would be worse outside by a 54-point margin. Higher ranks were pessimistic by 22 points, and lower ranks by 13 points. The longer respondents had served, the more likely they were to think their pay outside the Services would be worse. Those who joined within the last five years were quite evenly divided (40% thought pay would be better outside, 42% worse), while those who had served more than 20 years were pessimistic by a margin of 50 points (20% thought pay would be better, 70% worse).
- RAF personnel were more likely than those in other Services to expect their overall package would be worse once they left (saying it would be worse rather than better by a 26-point margin). Royal Marines were the least pessimistic, thinking their package would be worse rather than better by a margin of only 4 points. Overall, middle ranks were the most pessimistic, thinking their overall post-Services employment package would be worse rather than better by a 39-point margin (compared to 19 points among higher ranks and 16 points among lower ranks). Respondents were more pessimistic the longer they had served: those who had joined in the last five years were pessimistic by a 17-point margin, compared to 37 points among those who had served more than 20 years.

19. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	AGREE		DISAGREE		Net agreement
	Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly	
It will be easy for me to find a good job when I leave the military	4%	23%	47%	13%	-33%
Former colleagues or other ex-Service personnel will help me find a job when I leave	3%	32%	35%	11%	-11%
Most employers recognise the skills of ex-Service people, and are keen to employ them	4%	47%	26%	7%	+21%
I have transferable skills which will be useful in a civilian job	19%	56%	14%	6%	+55%
In the Forces I have gained at least one recognised civilian qualification which will help me find a job when I leave	18%	53%	16%	8%	+47%
I will probably need to take a pay cut when leaving the military	25%	42%	16%	5%	+46%
I will be competing for jobs against younger people who will be prepared to work for less	20%	49%	18%	3%	+48%
Many employers do not understand what we do in the military so might not give us a chance	14%	44%	27%	3%	+18%
When I leave the military I will need to take time out from work in order to retrain	10%	39%	29%	4%	+16%

- Overall, 39% of higher ranks thought it would be easy for them to find a job once they left the military, compared to 23% of middle and 25% of lower ranks. Royal Marines were the exception, with 39% of their lower ranks saying it would be easy for them to find a job.
- 61% of Royal Marines said they thought former colleagues or other former Service personnel would help them find a job when they leave – considerably more than in the other Services.
- Higher ranks (86%) were more likely than middle (78%) or lower ranks (70%) to say that they had transferable skills which would be useful in a civilian job. Overall the proportions thinking this ranged from 87% (Royal Navy and Royal Marines higher ranks) to 64% (Royal Marines lower ranks).
- 70% of Royal Navy personnel said they would probably have to take a pay cut on leaving the military, compared to only 50% of Royal Marines. Overall, middle ranks (82%) were more likely to expect a pay cut than higher (68%) or lower ranks (60%). In general, pessimism about future pay prospects increased with length of service: 48% of those who had joined in the last five years expected to have to take a pay cut when they left, rising to 81% of those who had served more than 20 years.

- Middle ranks were the most likely to think they would be competing for jobs against younger people prepared to work for less (76%), compared to 58% of higher and 69% of lower ranks. 72% of Army personnel expected this, compared to 57% of Royal Marines. Even a majority of those who had served five years or less (59%) said they would probably have to do so, rising to 74% of those who had served 16 to 20 years.

SECTION C: RECOGNITION AND REWARD

20. Overall, do you think the level of recognition received by current and former Service personnel in the UK is too much, too little, or about right?

	Too much	About right	Too little
Current Service personnel	1%	47%	46%
Ex-Service personnel	1%	29%	60%

- While Army and Royal Marines respondents were more likely to think the level of recognition and reward for current Service personnel was about right than too little (by 9-point and 7-point margins respectively), RAF respondents thought it was “too little” by 6 points and Royal Navy respondents by 17 points. Higher and ranks were considerably more likely to think the level of recognition was about right (by 14 points over “too little”), as did middle ranks (by 7 points), but lower ranks thought it was too little by 4 points (and lower ranks in the Royal Navy thought it was too little by a 24-point margin; only 34% thought the level of recognition and reward was “about right”). Longer serving personnel tended to have a more positive view: 53% of those who had served more than 20 years thought the level was about right, compared to 44% of those who had joined in the last ten years.
- There was less variation in views about the level of recognition and reward for former Service personnel, with majorities in all groups saying it was “too little”.

21. Thinking about the overall level of recognition and reward that current Service personnel receive in British society, which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

There isn't much recognition for current Service personnel, and there should be more	50%
There is quite a lot of recognition for current Service personnel, and that is as it should be	32%
There isn't much recognition for current Service personnel, but I'm happy with that	14%
There is too much recognition for current Service personnel	2%

- 56% of lower ranks (and 67% of Royal Navy lower ranks) thought there isn't much recognition and should be more, compared to 44% of middle ranks and 39% of higher. Royal Navy personnel (59%) were more likely to think this than those in other Services.
- The proportion saying there isn't much recognition and should be more declined with length of service: 57% of those who joined in the last five years thought this, compared to 41% of those who had served more than 20 years.
- Higher ranks in the Army and Royal Marines were the only groups more likely to think there is quite a lot of recognition and that is as it should be, than to think there isn't much recognition and there should be more.

22. To what extent do you feel that your garrison/station/base is recognised as an important part of the local community?

Strongly agree	20%	Somewhat agree	52%	Somewhat disagree	21%	Strongly disagree	7%
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- 82% of RAF personnel agreed that their establishment was recognised as an important part of the local community, compared to 69% of Army and Royal Navy respondents and 70% of Royal Marines.

23. If there were one extra thing that society (not the government) could do to recognise or reward **current** Forces personnel for their service to the country, what would it be?

Open-ended: most frequent answers

1	More / better Forces discounts
2	More recognition / knowledge of what the Forces do / the sacrifice
3	More respect / do not take the Forces for granted
4	More attendance at organised events / remembrance ceremonies / more patriotism
5	Let us contribute / invite us into existing social structures

24. How do you think the general public are **more** likely to view ex-Service personnel?

POSITIVELY: capable, experienced individuals with a lot to offer	71%
NEGATIVELY: aggressive, institutionalised, or likely to have problems	26%

25. Which of the following do you think best describes the way civilian employers view former Service personnel? [Please choose up to three]

Reliable	71%	Experienced	30%	Bossy	8%
Good leaders	47%	Institutionalised	25%	A risk	7%
Capable	39%	Skilled	22%	Inflexible	5%
Proactive	39%	Aggressive	12%	Unstable	0%

26. Thinking about the overall level of recognition and reward that **former** Service personnel receive in British society, which of the following comes closest to your view?

There isn't much recognition for former Service personnel, and there should be more	66%
There is quite a lot of recognition for former Service personnel, and that is as it should be	22%
There isn't much recognition for former Service personnel, but I'm happy with that	9%
There is too much recognition for former Service personnel	1%

- Throughout the Services, lower ranks were more likely to think there isn't much recognition for former Service personnel and there should be more (68%) than middle (64%) or higher ranks (59%).

27. If there were one extra thing that society (not the government) could do to recognise or reward **former** Service personnel for their service to the country, what would it be?

Open-ended: most frequent answers

1	Discounts
2	Better treatment / more support for veterans
3	More opportunities for training / employment
4	More respect
5	More recognition / knowledge of what they have done / the sacrifice

SECTION D: LIFE IN THE FORCES

28. When you joined the Forces, which of the following were the biggest attractions? Please rank in order, where 1 means it was the most important, 2 the next most important, etc.

1	Travel and adventure
2	Pay and benefits
3	Job security
4	Other
5	Serving Queen and country
6	The chance to learn a trade
7	Community spirit / camaraderie

- Royal Marines and Royal Navy personnel were more likely than Army or RAF respondents to say the biggest attractions were travel and adventure. Overall, higher ranks were the most likely to say this: 46% named it as the top attraction, compared to 33% of middle and 31% of lower ranking respondents.
- Middle and lower ranks (16%) were more than twice as likely as higher ranks (7%) to say the main attraction was job security.

29. How would you rate the following aspects of your current role?

	Very good	Good	TOTAL GOOD	Bad	Very bad	TOTAL BAD
Job satisfaction	13%	56%	69%	20%	9%	29%
Pay	11%	63%	74%	20%	4%	24%
Other benefits of the job	10%	61%	71%	22%	4%	26%
Job security	17%	51%	68%	19%	7%	26%
The overall package	8%	67%	75%	19%	2%	21%

- A higher proportion reported their job satisfaction as good or very good in higher (75%) and middle ranks (74%) than in lower ranks (66%).
- 79% of RAF personnel said their pay was good or very good, compared to 60% in the Royal Marines. 73% of Army respondents said this, and 76% of Royal Navy respondents. Middle ranks (83%) were the most likely to say their pay was good or very good. Higher ranks were similarly satisfied (82%) but only 68% of lower ranks said their pay was good or very good. Middle ranking Army and RAF personnel were the most likely overall to say their pay was good or very good (85%), and lower ranking Royal Marines the least likely (53%). Satisfaction with pay was greater among those who had served the longest: 65% of those who had joined in the last five years said their pay was good or very good, rising to 82% of those who had served more than 20 years.
- 87% of Royal Marines (including 90% of those in lower ranks) said job security as good or very good, compared to 71% of Army, 63% of RAF and 62% of Royal Navy personnel. Army higher ranks were the least likely to say their job security was good or very good (56%). Newer recruits were more satisfied with their job security than longer serving personnel: 83% of those who had joined in the last five years rated it good or very good, compared to 61% of those who had served 11 years or more.

30. How would you rate the balance between the sacrifices you make (e.g. personal risk, time away from family) and what you get in return (e.g. pay, time off, sports and Adventurous Training opportunities)?

Very good	4%	An even balance	41%	Not very good	53%
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- Higher ranks were evenly divided as to whether the balance was good or even on the one hand, or not very good on the other; lower ranks said the balance was not very good by a margin of 17 points (24 points in Royal Navy lower ranks).

31. And in recent years, has that balance improved, stayed the same or got worse?

Improved	8%	Stayed the same	41%	Got worse	50%
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- RAF personnel were more likely to say the balance had got worse in recent years (59%) than Royal Navy (54%), Army (46%) or Royal Marines (46%) respondents. 68% of higher ranks said the balance had got worse, compared to 59% of middle and 41% of lower ranks. 60% of those who had served more than 20 years said the balance had got worse, twice the proportion of those who had joined in the last five years.

Survey of the general public: UK and USA

2,033 UK adults were interviewed online on 13-14 March 2012. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the UK.

2,048 US adults were interviewed online between 19-25 March 2012. Results have been weighted to be representative of all adults in the US.

1. On a scale of 0 to 10, how positive or negative is your view of each of the following – where 0 means very negative indeed, and 10 means very positive indeed?

United Kingdom		Mean score	United States		Mean score
1	The Armed Forces	7.47	1	The Armed Services	7.68
2	The NHS	6.61	2	Local police department	6.39
3	The BBC	6.39	3	The Supreme Court	5.38
4	The police	6.23	4	The Federal Reserve	4.80
5	Parliament	3.83	5	The press	4.21
6	The press	3.73	6	Congress	3.32

- In the UK, men (7.50) and women (7.44) gave similar mean scores for the Armed Forces, and were almost equally likely to give positive or negative scores – though men were slightly more likely to give a maximum score of 10 (26%) than women (22%). Older respondents gave more positive scores than younger ones: 18-34 year-olds gave a mean score of 6.87, compared to 8.12 among those aged 65 or older.
- In the US, men gave a mean score of 7.98 for the Armed Services, compared to 7.40 for women. 82% of men gave a positive score (6+), compared to 74% of women; 38% of men and 26% of women gave a score of 10. 18-34 year-olds gave a mean score of 7.01, compared to 8.50 among those aged 65 or older.

2. [Those answering 0 to 4 at Q1] **You gave quite a low score for your view of the Armed Forces. Can you explain briefly why that is?**
Open-ended

United Kingdom		Base: 186	United States		Base: 174
1	Don't like wars/killing/death (25%)		1	Don't like wars/killing death (17%)	
2	Should not be there/current ops are illegal (24%)		2	Should not be there/current ops are illegal (11%)	
3	Financial cost (9%)		3	Financial cost (9%)	
4	Low opinion of politicians making the decisions (8%)		4	Personnel not properly looked after during or after (9%)	
5	Personnel like violence/are thugs/have low IQ (8%)		5	Low opinion of politicians making the decisions (9%)	
6	Lack of resources/equipment/numbers to do job (7%)		6	Disrespectful behaviour/killing civilians (8%)	
7	They choose to do it so should stop complaining (6%)		7	Don't like the Armed Services generally (7%)	
8	Personnel not properly looked after during or after (4%)		8	Recent controversies/negative news (7%)	
9	No need for them/don't do anything worthwhile (4%)		9	Recruitment is not selective enough (4%)	

3. [Those answering 6 to 10 at Q1] **You gave quite a high score for your view of the Armed Forces. Can you explain briefly why that is?**

Open-ended

	<i>United Kingdom</i> Base: 1,065	<i>United States</i> Base: 1,627
1	Do a great/important job/I wouldn't want to do it (45%)	Protect/defend country/keep us safe (66%)
2	Personnel risk their lives (21%)	I was/know someone who is/was in Services (24%)
3	Difficult circumstances/hard job (18%)	Respect/admire/appreciate them (24%)
4	Are fighting for us/for Queen and country (16%)	Personnel risk their lives (21%)
5	Protect/defend country/keep us safe (15%)	Do a great/important job/I wouldn't want to do it (21%)
6	Underfunded/not supported by govt/underpaid (14%)	Make many sacrifices (9%)
7	Brave/courageous/heroes/decent/selfless (11%)	Deserve our support (9%)
8	Respect/admire/appreciate them (10%)	They are good even if I don't agree with ops (8%)
9	Know someone who is/was in Forces (7%)	Difficult circumstances/hard job (8%)
10	They are good even if I don't agree with ops (7%)	Brave/courageous/heroes/decent/selfless (7%)
11	Underappreciated (4%)	Follow orders/never complain/get on with it (5%)
12	Deserve our support (4%)	They are volunteers (5%)
13	Follow orders/never complain/get on with it (3%)	Brave/courageous/heroes (4%)
14	Other (1%)	Underappreciated (4%)
15	Don't know (1%)	Underpaid (4%)

4. **What is the first word or phrase that comes to mind when you think of people who work in the Armed Forces?**

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
1	Brave/courageous (41%)	Brave/courageous (34%)
2	Committed/dedicated/disciplined/professional (12%)	Committed/dedicated/disciplined/professional (19%)
3	Heroes (7%)	Admirable/respected/honourable/loyal (18%)
4	Thick/stupid/fools/idiots (4%)	Heroes (9%)
5	Genuine/honest/loyal/honourable (7%)	Patriotic/for country/duty (8%)
6	War/guns/killing/death (3%)	Selfless/make sacrifices (6%)
7	Good/great/amazing (2%)	Protection/security/defence (5%)
8	Patriotic/for country/duty (2%)	Good/great/amazing (4%)
9	Thugs/weird/aggressive/louts/nutters (2%)	Tough/strong (3%)
10	At risk/in danger (2%)	Gratitude (3%)
11	Hard working/doing a good job (1%)	Pride (3%)
12	Tough/strong (1%)	War/guns/killing/death (3%)

5. Over the last few years, would you say your opinion of the Armed Forces has improved, got worse, or stayed the same?

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
Improved a lot	16%	13%
Improved a bit	21%	20%
Stayed about the same	55%	59%
Got a bit worse	5%	6%
Got a lot worse	3%	2%

- In the US, men were more likely to say their view of the Armed Services had improved (37%) than women (29%). The difference was smaller in the UK (39% to 36%). However, UK respondents aged 55+ were more likely to say their opinion had improved (41%) than 18-34s (33%) or 35-44s (35%).

6. How much do you think you know about what a member of the Armed Forces does on a day-to-day basis?

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
A great deal	10%	14%
Quite a lot	28%	28%
Not very much	52%	47%
Very little	10%	11%

- In the US, more than half of men (51%) said they knew a great deal or quite a lot about what a member of the Services does on a day-to-day basis, compared to 44% of men in the UK. In both countries, 32% of women said they knew a great deal or quite a lot.

7. Thinking about how the Armed Forces are portrayed in the media, whether on television, in newspapers or elsewhere, do you think they tend to be portrayed:

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
Very positively	25%	10%
Quite positively	52%	41%
Neutrally	18%	29%
Quite negatively	4%	18%
Very negatively	1%	2%

8. [Those thinking the Forces are portrayed positively in the media] **Do you think that positive portrayal is fair and accurate, or do you think the media deliberately focuses on positive things and ignores more negative aspects?**

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
The positive portrayal is fair and accurate	67%	67%
The media deliberately focuses on positive things and ignores more negative aspects	33%	33%

- In the US, men who thought the media portrayal of the Services was positive were more likely to think this was fair and accurate (72%) than women (62%); women (38%) were more likely than men (28%) to think negative aspects were ignored. The gap between men and women was much less significant in the UK.

9. [Those thinking the Forces are portrayed negatively in the media] **Do you think that negative portrayal is fair and accurate, or do you think the media deliberately focuses on negative things and ignores more positive aspects?**

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
The negative portrayal is fair and accurate	16%	9%
The media deliberately focuses on negative things and ignores more positive aspects	84%	91%

- In the US, men and women who thought the portrayal was negative thought the media deliberately ignored more positive aspects of the Services. In the UK, however, men (22%) were nearly twice as likely as women (11%) to think the negative portrayal was fair and accurate. 89% of women thought the media deliberately focused on negative things and ignored the positive, compared to 78% of men.

- 10/11 **Do you think a former officer in the Armed Forces would find it easier or more difficult than most other people to find a job outside the military?**

Do you think a former member of the Armed Forces from other ranks (non-officers) would find it easier or more difficult than most other people to find a new job outside the military?

	<i>United Kingdom</i>		<i>United States</i>	
	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Other ranks</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Enlisted ranks</i>
Would find it easier than most people to find a new job	29%	15%	41%	24%
No difference	41%	47%	37%	46%
Would find it harder than most people to find a new job	30%	39%	23%	30%

- In the US, men (47%) were rather more likely than women (35%) to think officers would find it easier than most people to find a new job. Women (27%) were more likely than men (18%) to think they would find it harder.
- 37% of men in the UK thought a former officer would find it easier than most people to find a new job, compared to 23% of women. 18-34s (37%) were nearly twice as likely as those aged 65 or over (20%) to think a former officer would find it harder.
- In both countries, differences of opinion between groups were much smaller on the question of enlisted ranks.

12. How common do you think it is for former members of the Armed Forces to have some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem as a result of their time in the Forces?

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
Very common	34%	30%
Quite common	57%	59%
Quite rare	8%	10%
Very rare	*	1%

- In both countries, women were more likely than men to think these problems were common. 42% of women in the UK, and 36% in the US, thought they were “very common” (compared to 26% of UK men and 25% of US men).
- In the UK, 94% of 18-34s thought these problems were common, compared to 88% of those aged 65 or over. There was a similar pattern in the US (from 90% to 83%).

13. When you see (or if you saw) a member of the Armed Forces out and about in uniform in a town near you, have you ever (or could you see yourself) going up to thank them for their service?

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>United States</i>
Yes – I have done so	8%	33%
Yes – I could see myself doing so	19%	34%
No, because I would be embarrassed	26%	15%
No, because I think he or she would be embarrassed	13%	5%
No, because I don’t think it is necessary or appropriate to do so	34%	14%

- In the US, men and women were similarly likely to say they had thanked a member of the Forces for their service or could see themselves doing so, though men (38%) were more likely than women (29%) to have done so already. 82% of those aged 65 or over said they had done so or could see themselves doing so, compared to 57% of 18-34s. The youngest group (17%) was nearly three times as likely as the oldest group (6%) to say it was not necessary or appropriate to do so.
- In the UK, 11% of men said they had thanked a member of the Forces for their service, compared to 6% of women. 32% of men and 24% of women either said they had done so or could see themselves doing so. Women (31%) were more likely than men (20%) to say they would be embarrassed. 37% of men and 31% of women said they did not think it was necessary or appropriate to do so. 40% of 18-34s said this (more than twice the level for the same group in the US), compared to 27% of those aged 65 or over (more than four times the level for their US counterparts).

14/15 Thinking about what British society (not the government) does to recognise and support people in the Armed Forces, do you think:

Thinking about what British society (not the government) does to recognise and support people who used to be in the Armed Forces but have now left, do you think:

	<i>United Kingdom</i>	
	<i>Current personnel</i>	<i>Former personnel</i>
We should do more to recognise and support them	62%	62%
We do enough to recognise and support them	33%	34%
We do too much to recognise and support them	5%	4%

- Nearly three quarters (73%) of those aged 65 or over thought British society should do more, compared to 52% of 18-34s. Women (64%) were slightly more likely than men (60%) to say society should do more. Men (7%) were slightly more likely than women (3%) to say it does too much. There was a similar pattern on the question of former Service personnel.

16/17 [Those saying British society should do more at Q14] You said you think British society could do more to recognise and support people in the Armed Forces. What do you think we could do?

[Those saying British society should do more at Q15] You said you think British society could do more to recognise and support people who used to be in the Armed Forces. What do you think we could do?

<i>Current personnel</i>	<i>Base: 1,266</i>	<i>Former personnel</i>	<i>Base: 1,270</i>
Respect/appreciate/praise them/don't abuse them (18%)		Help getting jobs/training and education (15%)	
More support generally (10%)		Better mental health care (13%)	
More support for those leaving the Forces (10%)		Rehabilitation into society (13%)	
More physical care/help if injured (9%)		More support generally (12%)	
Better pay/financial support (9%)		Better housing/help with housing/don't let them be homeless (10%)	
Better mental health care (8%)		Respect/appreciate/praise them/don't abuse them (9%)	
Better housing/help with housing/don't let them be homeless (7%)		More financial support (7%)	
Better support for families/widows (7%)		Benefits/free healthcare/medical support (6%)	
Help getting jobs/training and education (7%)		More physical care/help if injured (5%)	
Fundraising/Poppies/charity work (7%)		Fundraising/Poppies/charity work (4%)	
Rehabilitation into society/help returning to civvy street (6%)		More support on leaving Forces (4%)	
Public days/holidays/parades/memorials (6%)		Better support for families/widows (3%)	
Benefits/free healthcare/medical support (5%)		More awareness of what they do/more positive media info (3%)	
More awareness of what they do/more positive media info (5%)		Public days/holidays/parades/memorials (3%)	
Better conditions/equipment/no cuts (5%)		Better pensions/care in old age (3%)	
Discounts etc (2%)		Discounts etc (1%)	
Better pensions/care in old age (1%)			

Survey of UK employers

508 individuals with responsibility for recruitment or hiring in small and medium-sized companies were interviewed by telephone between 11 and 24 January 2012.

1. When recruiting, do you often, sometimes, rarely or never struggle to find candidates with the skills and qualities you need?

Often	16%	Sometimes	39%	Rarely	26%	Never	18%
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2. Of these roles, which **two** are the most difficult to find the appropriately skilled people for?

Specialist skilled/professional	50%
Managerial	28%
Skilled manual	25%
Sales/customer service	15%
Administrative/clerical	7%
Unskilled manual	5%
Trainee/apprentice	4%

3. Thinking about the particular skills or qualities that you look for when recruiting staff, which of the following skills or qualities are hardest to find? [Up to three responses]

Technical qualifications and ability	40%
Ability to come up with creative solutions to problems	28%
Communication skills	26%
Positive attitude to work	23%
People management skills	23%
Using initiative	21%
Directly relevant experience	18%
Ability to take decisions independently	18%
Time management	16%
Ability to work well under stress	12%
Ability to follow instructions	8%

- Of those who said they often or sometimes struggle to find candidates with the skills and qualities they need, 38% said "ability to come up with creative solutions to problems" was one of the hardest attributes to find, and 28% named a "positive attitude to work". Only 14% named "directly relevant experience".

4. As far as you know, have you been involved in employing anyone who has served in the Armed Forces in the last five years?

Yes	21%	No	76%
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5. [Those answering “Yes” at Q4] **Overall, how would you describe this person/these people’s impact on the workplace?**

Positive	60%	Neutral	28%	Negative	10%
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6. **As far as you know, have you been involved in interviewing anyone who had served in the Armed Forces in the last five years?**

Yes	12%	No	84%
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7. **Overall, how would you describe the impression this person/these people gave at interview?**

Positive	71%	Neutral	13%	Negative	13%
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8. **Imagine you have received a very large number of applications for a job, and are deciding which applicants to invite for interview. Other things being equal, if an applicant’s CV showed they had spent several years in the Armed Forces, would this make you more inclined to progress their application, or less inclined?**

Much more inclined	11%
Slightly more inclined	23%
NO DIFFERENCE	54%
Slightly less inclined	3%
Much less inclined	1%
Don’t know	8%

9. [Those answering “More inclined” at Q8] **Why would time in the Forces make you more inclined to progress that candidate’s application?**

Open-ended: most frequent answers

Disciplined	57%
Follow instructions/reliable/loyal	30%
Training/experience/skills	13%
Other	6%
Not stated	24%

10. [Those answering “Less inclined” at Q8] **Why would time in the Forces make you less inclined to progress that candidate’s application?**

Open-ended: most frequent answers

Institutionalised/inadaptable	56%
Lack of experience	44%

- Note: Q10 was only asked of 4% of the total sample (those who said they would be less inclined to progress an application from a candidate with Forces experience)

11. Please can you say whether you think a former member of the Armed Forces is more likely to display the following attributes than applicants in general, or less likely.

	More likely	No difference	Less likely	Net 'more likely'
Ability to follow instructions	87%	9%	1%	+78%
Ability to work well under stress	76%	20%	2%	+74%
Time management	75%	19%	2%	+73%
Communication skills	58%	31%	5%	+53%
Positive attitude to work	56%	36%	2%	+54%
People management skills	44%	42%	7%	+37%
Using their initiative	49%	32%	14%	+35%
Technical qualifications and ability	40%	40%	13%	+27%
Ability to make decisions independently	40%	37%	18%	+22%
Ability to come up with creative solutions to problems	32%	50%	12%	+20%
Directly relevant experience	13%	39%	40%	-27%

12. Please can you say whether you think a former officer in the Armed Forces / a former member of the Armed Forces in other (non-officer) ranks is likely or unlikely to possess the following characteristics?

	OFFICER			OTHER RANKS			Officer margin
	Likely	Unlikely	Net	Likely	Unlikely	Net	
Ability to follow instructions	88%	6%	+82%	92%	2%	+90%	-8
Directly relevant experience	45%	38%	+7%	46%	37%	+9%	-2
Positive attitude to work	86%	3%	+83%	83%	5%	+78%	+5
Technical qualifications and ability	69%	18%	+51%	66%	22%	+44%	+7
Ability to work well under stress	91%	1%	+90%	86%	3%	+83%	+7
Time management	93%	2%	+91%	86%	6%	+80%	+11
Communication skills	91%	3%	+88%	81%	9%	+72%	+16
Using their initiative	88%	5%	+83%	72%	17%	+55%	+28
Ability to come up with creative solutions to problems	80%	9%	+71%	63%	22%	+41%	+30
People management skills	89%	5%	+84%	64%	24%	+40%	+44
Ability to make decisions independently	88%	5%	+83%	62%	25%	+37%	+46

13. Thinking about people who are leaving after several years in the Armed Forces, which of the following best sums up what you think they would be like as individuals, even if neither completely describes your view?

Capable, experienced individuals with a lot to offer	78%
Aggressive, institutionalised, or likely to have problems	10%
Don't know	11%

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