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CAPITALISING ON MILITARY FAMILY TALENT

November 2020

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CAPITALISING ON MILITARY FAMILY TALENT

Life for members of an Armed Forces family can have its challenges. Serving family members can expect to relocate, be apart from their family during deployments and face long and unpredictable working hours. These conditions naturally have an impact on family members and this extends to their ability to gain and sustain employment.

Alongside supporting ex-military personnel, employers can take steps to ensure military family members – particularly military partners – are given consideration.

This toolkit explains how family members of those serving in the military can be affected and what steps employers can take. It can be used as a supplement to the [Capitalising on Military Talent toolkit](#).

Why support for family members matters

Support for military family members should be part of your business's commitment to ensuring military and ex-military personnel are treated fairly. When military family members are well-supported, this is likely to enable military personnel to sustain their service. Support for military family members will also benefit your business, unlocking much-needed skills and experience.

¹ Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and support required, 2018

Qualifications

42% of military spouses surveyed by Warwick University had a higher degree and/or a professional qualification, while only 1% reported having no qualifications¹.

Transferable skills

Due to relocating, military family members may have to change career but have transferable essential skills useful to many businesses, such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork.

Life skills

Military family members are likely to have developed a unique skillset because of their association with the military. This could include essential skills such as resilience, adaptability, communication, or practical skills such as project management.

The benefits military family members bring are very similar to veterans themselves – committed, resilient and flexible.

Lucy Heaver, Employment Specialist and Policy Adviser, Naval Families Federation

Barriers military family members can face

Despite these strengths, 23% of military partners are not in employment.² A survey conducted by the Warwick Institute for Employment of 1,491 military

²Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Military spousal/partner employment





spouses and partners found that 84% of those not working (for reasons including education and caring responsibilities) want to find work; however, only 19% were actively looking for employment.³

This suggests that military family members can face barriers while applying for work, but also that barriers can prevent them from being able to work. Often this is due to the nature of being primary carers for children or elderly relatives. Of those surveyed 96% were female and 80% had children under 16 years, while 5% had other caring responsibilities.

These same caring responsibilities can act as a barrier to gaining or sustaining employment for civilians; however, for military partners there are often additional challenges to overcome.

87% of military spouses

thought it was more challenging to gain employment compared with civilians.⁴

Relocating for a new post

Moving between locations for postings is part of the military lifestyle, particularly for those serving in the Army. For military partners and family members, this can create several challenges with regards to employment.

- **Maintaining employment** can be challenging if having to move to a new location every few years, sometimes with very little advanced warning. Research suggests that this impacts on the career choices of military partners, who

are more likely to choose 'portable' roles such as childcare, healthcare or administration. Even in these roles however, partners can find themselves out of work for several months during the transition to a new location, or unable to gain work at the same level.

- The **remote location** of some military bases can also be a barrier for partners maintaining employment or finding a new role. Even if a partner works for a national company it can be difficult to relocate due to a lack of flexibility regarding location and challenges accessing childcare. These same barriers can limit career options for military partners, leaving many at risk of underemployment as they are unable to find work commensurate to their skills and experience.
- **Moving overseas** for a period can make it more difficult to find work. Skills and experience in the UK may not translate overseas and in some countries there can be restrictions that mean spouses or partners are not able to work.
- This regular disruption can mean military partners have **gaps in their CVs**, which can make it more difficult to gain employment with every new move.

Childcare

Childcare is cited as one of the biggest challenges for military partners in gaining employment. In Warwick University's survey of military spouses, when asked about the challenges of finding and maintaining work, four of the top five responses from military partners relate to childcare.⁵ This is not surprising and fits with the wider pattern for parents highlighted in research by Mumsnet and the Resolution Foundation which found that a third

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 2018





of mothers say the cost of childcare is an obstacle to them working more.⁶

- During deployment, military partners face periods of solo parenting, but even when military personnel are not deployed, demanding and unpredictable working hours can make it difficult to share childcare responsibilities.

When he is away, I become a single parent and my whole employment model changes from one day to the other.

Military spouse

- Many parents rely on a **local network of family and friends** to help with childcare. For military families, regular re-location makes it unlikely that family members will be nearby, and it can be difficult to find alternative support networks.
- The **remote locations** of military bases can mean fewer affordable and flexible childcare options.

Deployment

All military families can expect a serving family member to be deployed overseas. This usually brings periods of separation, which can impact on the wellbeing of family members. Partners will often have to manage their own wellbeing, while also supporting any children to deal with the separation.

- **Addressing wellbeing in the workplace increases productivity by up to 12%.⁷** Military family members may experience heightened stress, anxiety and sadness before and during periods of deployment. All military personnel can have a two-week period of Rest and Recreation (R&R), which can provide a relief for family members but also impact on

wellbeing when family members return to their deployment.

When my partner was in Afghanistan I was pregnant with our middle child and I was coming in to work and felt like my colleagues forget what's going on in my head when I haven't had a phone call for five days or the lines cut off when I was talking with him. I don't remember anybody asking if I was ok at any point during his tours.

Military spouse

Military expectations

Though there is some support on offer for military families, spouses and partners can feel that they are treated as dependents without their own aspirations.

- This can sometimes lead to an **assumption of flexibility** which doesn't take into consideration employment status or other commitments. If this is combined with a lack of flexibility from an employer, it can be difficult for family members to maintain work and may prevent them from seeking employment.

That's a big thing of military life - things change constantly and sometimes companies don't understand the changes. For example, COVID-19 has been a massive issue for me because I haven't had my parents there to help me when my partner is away and I still had to come in to the office.

Military spouse

- Military partners can feel there are **expectations** that come with their partners'

⁶ Survey by Mumsnet and Resolution Foundation, 2014

⁷ Oswald, A.J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2015). Happiness and Productivity. Journal of Labor Economics, 33 (4), 789- 822. doi: 10.1086/681096





employment. On top of their own employment and family life, there can be pressure to attend events, fundraise and be involved in the military community.

I feel like I am not able to contribute enough to my military life due to my career. I feel like the military community expects more from me.

Military spouse

partners' employment in case it leads to other negative perceptions.

- Military partners are also concerned that employers may assume they have **conflicting commitments** rather than assessing them based on their skills and experience.

Demystifying military partners

45% of military spouses

have felt discriminated against by an employer in looking for or keeping a job.⁸

In some cases, military family members will choose to disclose their partners' employment; however, partners also indicated a concern that employers will discriminate on the basis of having a military address.

- **The possibility of relocation** due to future postings or deployment was thought to be a reason for employers rejecting applicants. Military partners share a concern that employers would not offer a job because of the risk of relocation.
- **Employment history** is also perceived to be a challenge, with military partners having to change jobs, and sometimes career, frequently. Employers may be more understanding if they are aware of these circumstances, however many partners are afraid to disclose their

⁸ Warwick Institute for Employment Research, 2018





Take action

Inspire: how to inspire and prepare military family members for employment

- Consider whether the interventions you provide to ex-military personnel can be extended to include military family members. This could include insight days, one-to-one support or workshops, partnerships with specialist charities and work experience. Full guidance on these activities can be found in the [Capitalising on Military Talent toolkit](#).
- Focus on activities that build confidence to return to the workplace and consider how to adapt any existing 'returner' programmes already in place.
- If your business is located near a military base, consider running an information session on site for military family members.
- Explore ways to offer employment support remotely so that military family members can improve their employability regardless of their location.

VETS

Barclays leads the [Veterans' Employment Transition Support](#) (VETS) programme, a collaborative employability initiative designed to help the military community find the right jobs.

Lisa Marr, Programme Manager at VETS, ran a two-week programme in Scotland to help military partners get closer to the job market by providing interview tips, CV support and confidence building exercises.

The programme was well received in Scotland with many hiring Scottish businesses present and approximately six military spouses found employment.



The programme has been very successful in Scotland and we plan to extend it into Wales, with a huge amount of support at government and business level as well.

Lisa Marr, Programme Manager, VETS

NHS Employers

The Step into Health programme provides a dedicated pathway for the Armed Forces community, including spouses and dependants, to access the numerous career opportunities available in the NHS. The programme asks employers to commit to working towards five mandatory pledges and encourages activities such as insight days, work placements and establishing an Armed Forces network. Gemma Wright, Programme Lead for the Step into Health Programme, explains:

There is still a big need to educate both employers and the military community of the benefits that each bring.

Gemma Wright, Programme Lead, Step into Health

Gemma works closely with NHS organisations to champion the skills of the military community and remove bias. She also works with the military community to help them gain access to the job market and manage expectations.

Step into Health is run by NHS Employers, with support from partners NHS England & NHS Improvement, Walking with the Wounded and the Royal Foundation.



Hire: create an accessible recruitment process

- Remove addresses from job applications to reduce the risk of bias against military family members
- Update vetting policies to ensure they do not exclude military partners
- Consider whether roles could be carried out remotely, or adapted in case of relocation
- Offer flexible working arrangements, including flexible hours and part-time working
- Advertise any support your business provides for military family members
- Offer the opportunity for military family members to disclose their status, being clear that the purpose is to enable your business to offer the right support

Standard Life Aberdeen

Standard Life Aberdeen (SLA) has a long pedigree of supporting Armed Forces and understands that military family members also face challenges in finding employment and in managing their work and partners' military commitments. SLA is a signatory to the UK Armed Forces Corporate Covenant, holds the Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, and also has a well-established, high-profile Armed Forces Network which provides additional support for members.

SLA's recruitment process focuses on capabilities rather than on qualifications and work history to ensure military family members, who may have career gaps in their CVs, are not singled out. During the vetting process, HR take an individualised approach to each case that isn't prescriptive about work history or where a candidate has lived. SLA also recognises the transferrable skills military family members bring and seeks to remove any barriers individuals may face during the recruitment process. They use

diverse interview panels with access to specific recruitment guidance on employing service leavers and military family members; offer transitional schemes; and ensure that all their external adverts meet their diversity and inclusion commitments.

For military family members in their workforce, SLA understands their additional military obligations and leave requirements. They offer Smarter Working, five days' paid Armed Forces Spouse or Partner leave (which can be taken before, during or after a deployment) to military family members, and up to ten days' paid Reservist Leave. Each case is assessed on an individual basis, and there is always flexibility to accommodate each circumstance.

Standard Life Aberdeen fully supports me in managing work and my partner's military commitments and it's very much on an individual basis. I feel comfortable to speak up and know I have very supportive colleagues.

Sophie Underwood, Standard Life Aberdeen

Deloitte

Deloitte is immensely proud of the positive impact it has on the Armed Forces community and wider industry. It helps service leavers make a successful transition into a new commercial career and has programmes and policies that benefit military family members, including advertising vacancies through Forces Families Jobs. Though Deloitte does not specifically target the Armed Forces community, its inclusive approach offers them an agile working policy, and the possibility of relocation to accommodate their partner's deployment. Deloitte also offers its employees a four-week "Time out" or a six-month career break, which would allow military family members to juggle employment with supporting their family – through deployment, relocation or other military commitments.





In terms of recruitment, it offers Return to Work supporting hiring opportunities, open to anyone who has taken an extended career break, typically for two years or more. This is a could be of great benefit to military family members who have had to pause their careers due to their partners' military commitments. It acknowledges that individuals that have been away from work for a while may need to refresh their skills and boost their confidence. It offers mentoring and access to a network of people in a similar situation.

Many individuals come through this route after taking some time off to raise children, but it could equally be helpful for military family members who have had to pause their careers to support their military spouse

Ellie Day, Deloitte LLP

Deloitte is also extremely proud to have recently retained its Gold Award, through the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, initially awarded in 2014.

Alun Griffiths

Amanda, now an HR advisor at Griffiths, struggled for three years to find employment after deciding to leave the Armed Forces and take a career break to raise her children while her husband continued in the military. She found the experience demoralising and it was not until she reached out for help to translate her military life experience into a CV that she started to receive offers.

From the first interview with Griffiths, Amanda knew the environment and culture there would sit well with her values and standards and allow her to manage work and her partner's military commitments successfully. The interview focused on her skills and was an open and transparent conversation about the role and expectations.

Since being employed at Griffiths, Amanda is fully supported with her husband's work and training

commitments allowing her the flexibility to collect her children from school and work from home when necessary. In addition, Amanda highlights the importance of being able to approach her line manager openly when she needs support and to look after her wellbeing. In November, Amanda and her family will move to England following her husband's promotion in the Army and Griffiths has committed to look for options throughout the Group to ensure she remains a valued member of the team.

Griffiths is a signatory to the UK Armed Forces Corporate Covenant and holds the Gold Award from the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.





Grow: Retain, develop and progress your military family talent

- Set up an internal network for military family members, or include family members in any existing groups for ex-military personnel
- Train managers to understand some of the challenges military family members can face
- Allow staff the flexibility to take leave around re-location, deployment and R&R periods, introducing special-leave policies if necessary
- Ensure flexible progression opportunities
- Consider location when offering training opportunities, making online opportunities available where possible

BT

As one of UK's largest employers of veterans, BT recognises the value military family members bring to their business and actively support this cohort to civilian employment. Alexandra Ferguson, Payment Industry Specialist at BT and recent military spouse, has been learning how to manage her work and partner's military commitments and has found the following support from BT fundamental:

- Ability to work from home – being able to join external meetings virtually instead of having to travel has been a huge advantage to Alexandra as it allows her to take care of her home responsibilities when her partner is away
- Flexible working – technology enablement behind flexible working is very helpful for military family members to ensure they are making the most out of technology and to ease their jobs
- Support from line managers – managers normally go beyond HR policies in supporting individuals and are very flexible

- Non-managerial support – support is also peer-driven and colleagues are understanding of the challenges military family members may face.

Becoming a military family member has helped me re-address the work-life balance in my life. Before I would spend a lot of time working and travelling, but now I've been forced to change that to make sure I am able to spend time with my partner back home.

Alexandra Ferguson, BT

Virgin Money

Beyond helping veterans into civilian work, Virgin Money is committed to supporting military family members by endeavouring to help requests for annual leave where possible before, during and after a family member has undertaken a period of deployment. Vikki is a Team Leader at Virgin Money and until 2020, her partner was based remotely including three six-month tours to Afghanistan. This was very challenging for Vikki at times as she felt like she was trying to juggle a career whilst looking after her family – she has held back from going for promotions in the past as a result, affecting her wellbeing.

I kind of stopped myself going for any promotion because I didn't feel I could commit to a role.

Vikki, Team Leader, Virgin Money

However, with the support of Virgin Money and her family, she has been able to manage her career and personal commitments successfully and has even gone for a promotion. Being able to work remotely and flexibly have been key to her success both at work and at home.

Royal Bank of Scotland (NatWest Group)

Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest are signatories to the UK Armed Forces Corporate Covenant and as part of that have pledged to





provide bespoke help for colleagues who are military family members. NatWest group has adopted a sympathetic and flexible approach to requests for leave from spouses or partners of serving personnel as part of their overall commitment to ensure all requests are treated fairly, consistently and based on the circumstances of the individual. In addition, NatWest Group provides special leave for employees who are bereaved or have partners who have been injured on active service. Wherever possible, they support staff wishing to relocate to find alternative employment within the group or agree a flexible working arrangement.

Katharine became a military family member while employed at NatWest and since then she has successfully been able to adapt her employment around her partner's military commitments with the support of NatWest. Because of this, she doesn't feel having to balance her career and military commitments has had a detrimental effect in her life.

Over the last 8 years or so, NatWest has been extremely supportive by enabling me to move my role to different areas of the country to be with my partner. It's only more recently that it has become harder to relocate due to the nature of my role, but even then, I've always been supported to find a way around. For instance, prior to COVID-19 my partner and I were due to move and NatWest had arranged a sort of unconventional job for me which would allow me to keep my career and pursue my military commitments.

Katharine, Military Partner, Natwest

Consider other family members

Military family members are likely to be spouses or partners of serving personnel. However, other family members may also be affected and need

support. This may include adult children whose employability may likewise be affected, or parents who require the flexibility around deployment and R&R periods.

Enbarr Enterprises

As a Silver award winner of the Armed Forces Covenant, Enbarr Enterprises is committed to improving employment outcomes for the Armed Forces community, particularly for dependents, through providing additional support to children of service people in schools. Vicki Roskams, Engagement Manager/Director at Enbarr and a child of a service person, highlighted that their recent survey showed 388 schools across Wales housed service children, and of the 898 children polled, 1 in 7 reported having additional learning needs.

This, coupled with her own experience, led Enbarr Foundation to actively work with the Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru on education initiatives to support children and families who may be facing social isolation due to a parent's deployment.

As a child of a service person, I grew up with a one-parent family, with four older sisters and due to deployment I grew a high level of flexibility in order to adapt to new places, new schools, and new peers. I did feel as a child I was sometimes playing catch up in my studies, but this helped develop my determination to succeed. This growth of soft skills, that started early in my life, has helped me adapt and build resilience to an ever-changing world and situations. It has also helped grow key leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills, and a strong work ethic and loyalty.

Vicki Roskams, Engagement Manager, Enbarr Ffundation





In addition, the Enbarr Foundation is in the process of building an Armed Forces Hub which will support military family members in Wales. It will have a STEM/STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and maths) centre specifically for dependents, and a community centre where everyone can come together.

TOP TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

If you are considering providing employment support to military family members in your organisation, these are the top tips from employers leading on this agenda:

- Make public commitments like signing the Armed Forces Covenant
- Have buy-in from senior leaders and ideally a high-profile sponsor
- Establish an employee network and draw on the experience of those in the network
- Engage with external stakeholders to help you get it right from the start

