

# **The Veterans Community - Employability, Skills and Learning**

**Scottish Government response**

**March 2017**

## ***“The Veterans Community – Employability, Skills and Learning”:*** **Scottish Government response**

### **Introduction**

The Scottish Government welcomes the report by the Scottish Veterans Commissioner ‘*The Veterans Community – Employability, Skills and Learning*’ published in November last year, and responds positively to all recommendations.

Last year the Scottish Government published “*Renewing our Commitments*”. That document highlighted Scottish Government achievements and future priorities to support veterans and their families in realising their full potential. The Scottish Government is determined that Scotland becomes the destination of choice for Service leavers, and ensuring that there are high quality, sustainable jobs is central to this.

We recognise many of the challenges raised in the report about how best to achieve these opportunities, including how to provide support to and mobilise employers; how to work with individuals to enhance and better promote their skills; and the role that further qualifications can play in preparing veterans for future employment.

Valuable work is already underway within the Scottish Government and elsewhere to address these challenges. Notable progress has been made in developing the **Scottish Veterans Fund**, with a new dedicated strand for projects geared towards veterans employment, sponsored by Standard Life. This new contribution from the private sector is greatly appreciated and, together with a multi-year commitment from the Scottish Government, the Fund now totals £600,000 over three years. Work is underway to explore how to develop the Fund further.

The Scottish Government has also just announced funding of up to £6.1m in 2017/18 for **Phase 7 of Community Jobs Scotland (CJS)**. This programme aims to support up to 700 job training opportunities lasting up to 12 months with third sector employers, including opportunities for Early Service Leavers and other veterans. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) which delivers the programme provides recruiting opportunities through Poppyscotland and other organisations.

The Scottish Government remains committed to **Scotland’s Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI)** in partnership with local government and in consultation with Skills Development Scotland, businesses and third sector organisations. SERI has a focus on a number of vulnerable groups and offers employers up to £4,000 over the course of the first 12 months of employment, supplemented by £500 if the employer pays the participant the living wage. Early Service Leavers and other Armed Forces personnel as well as the partners of current or former Armed Forces personnel (aged 16-29) are eligible for support under SERI. Since July 2015 to the end of December 2016, 1,317 employers had participated in the programme and 1,533 young people have been supported into a sustainable job or Modern Apprenticeship.

The Scottish Government response is set out against the recommendations in the rest of this document, with emphasis on those where responsibility for implementation falls to the Scottish Government. Many recommendations propose a partnership working approach to take forward implementation and we are keen to embrace that. Core to our approach to implementation will be the new **Veterans Employability Strategic Group** which will be established and supported by the Scottish Government. Further details are provided below.

This report sets a constructive challenge for the coming year and helpfully acknowledges the very positive approach of many organisations in the public, private and third sector towards veterans and their families. Building on this great strength, we will work collaboratively with the Commissioner and with our partners to pursue these recommendations with energy and determination.

## **Recommendations and Response**

### **1. Securing Employment**

#### **Recommendation 1 - Veterans Employability Strategic Working Group**

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

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation. Our ambition is to make Scotland the destination of choice for Service leavers and their families, and ensuring high quality job opportunities is essential to this. There is already a great deal of activity underway in Scotland and the Scottish Government agrees that a forum is needed to secure greater strategic direction.

We will therefore establish and provide support for a Veterans Employability Strategic Group with senior membership from key organisations identified by the Commissioner, including Skills Development Scotland, the Careers Transitions Partnership and the Department for Work and Pensions. This group should also work closely with existing delivery-focussed groups such as Scottish Veterans Employment and Training Service (SVETS).

The Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work is pleased to confirm that Mark Bibbey, Chief Executive of Poppyscotland will chair this group. Mr Bibbey currently heads up the Support Pillar within Veterans Scotland and, as Chief Executive of Poppyscotland has extensive experience of veterans employment.

The first meeting of the Group will be convened in Spring to confirm membership, remit and priorities. Terms of reference will be considered by the Group but it is intended that it will create a mechanism for the consideration of strategic issues, such as how to identify and tackle skills gaps and barriers to employment. The group will play a vital role in taking forward and overseeing some related recommendations set out in the Commissioner's report, as outlined elsewhere in the document.

## **Recommendation 2 - Scottish Veterans Fund**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation, and substantial recent progress has been made to meet this commitment.

The Scottish Veterans Fund was established in 2008. Since then, the Fund has invested more than £830,000 and supported 125 projects to provide advice, help and support to thousands of veterans, ranging from employability and housing support to befriending and wellbeing projects, making a vital difference to people's lives.

This year's Scottish Veterans Fund, which opened for applications on 24 November 2016, has been expanded to include a dedicated employment strand, sponsored by Standard Life. Applications have been encouraged for projects which:

- assist veterans facing additional barriers to employment;
- promote best practice transitions to employment;
- assist wider spousal/family employment, supporting effective veteran transitions.

The Fund will now total £600,000 over three years, including contributions from the Scottish Government and from Standard Life. Decision-making on the Fund is currently underway, with the outcome due to be announced in late March 2017.

The Scottish Government is keen to maximise the opportunities the Scottish Veterans Fund can provide, and will work with other employers to explore further potential for contributions.

### **Recommendation 3 - Filling the Skills Gap**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation and, as proposed, it will ask the Veterans Employability Strategic Group to consider how it can best be implemented as an early priority.

The role of many of our partners is key to delivering this recommendation and it is helpful that, for example, Skills Development Scotland have already confirmed that they will work with the Scottish Government to review how the veterans community could be most effectively utilised to fill the known skills gaps in key sectors; such as education, health, IT, engineering, construction, finance and insurance.

### **Recommendation 4 - Employability Pilot Scheme**

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

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

The Scottish Government is keen to support this recommendation, and will explore further with local government and with the Veterans Employability Strategic Group how it can best be implemented. A number of local initiatives already exist and it is important to seek views and respect the role of local government and other locally based organisations on this issue.

Consideration will be given to the feasibility of a pilot in different geographical areas, how best to engage with all necessary organisations and which organisation is best placed to coordinate this work.

## **Recommendation 5 - Research and Evaluation**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation and recognises that being able to measure and evaluate progress and impact is vital. We therefore commit to exploring what data gaps exist and how these may be addressed, seeking assistance from the Veterans Employability Strategic Group. Many organisations who will sit on the Group, such as the Careers Transitions Partnership, will hold useful data which may inform this work. The Scottish Government plans to write to the Ministry of Defence to seek access to Careers Transition Partnership data which may also help to establish the baseline.

Analysis will also be made of existing published data, such as the recent October 2016 “*Population Survey: UK Armed Forces Veterans residing in Great Britain, 2015*”, published by Defence Statistics. The report provides estimates on the size and socio-demographic characteristics of the UK veteran population living in households, using responses provided in the 2015 Annual Population Survey (APS), produced by the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

## **Recommendation 6 - Work Placements**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation and work is currently underway to promote work placements for veterans to employers.

In October last year, the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work launched the *Supporting Veterans into Employment* project, developed in partnership between Business in the Community Scotland and SaluteMyJob. This initiative encourages businesses of all sizes and sectors proactively to recruit and benefit from employing veterans in the civilian workforce.

A best practice toolkit for employers, developed through this initiative, will be launched later in March 2017. This will include guidance on how best to use work placements to support veterans into employment. The toolkit will be shared via employers networks with different employer groups and through other routes such as the Developing the Young Workforce Regional Groups.

The Scottish Government will evaluate the use and impact of this toolkit, and will pursue this and other future measures to support work placements as identified by the Veterans Employability Strategic Group.

## **2. Qualifications and Skills**

### **Recommendation 7 - Improving Literacy and Numeracy**

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

The Big Plus, Scotland's national adult literacy and numeracy campaign, has been running since 2004. It is a partnership between Skills Development Scotland (SDS) with advice on adult literacy and numeracy provided by Education Scotland.

This recommendation is not for the Scottish Government specifically to take forward. The role of many of our partners is key to leading on, and delivering, this recommendation including Education Scotland, Colleges and Local Authorities. In addition, Education Scotland and SDS are currently working together to refresh the Big Plus Website. Furthermore, with regard to all of the recommendations that refer to SDS, they are establishing a working group to look at the coherent offer for Veterans and to consider the recommendations further.

### **Recommendation 8 - Recognition of Qualifications and Skills**

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

The Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will ask the Veterans Employability Strategic Group to take this recommendation forward. Skills Development Scotland has already agreed to consider this issue at their internal working group on veterans in the next few weeks.

### **Recommendation 9 - Support for the Long-Term**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation and is aware that excellent work is already underway to develop this relationship further.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Career Transitions Partnership (CTP) have agreed to work more closely; SDS is also continuing to work closely with the

Armed Forces community and have formed strong links with Veterans Scotland. This partnership working will continue with a focus on information sharing as they look to improve support for Early Service Leavers.

SDS is examining how closer working with the CTP can enhance its service offer to Service leavers and help develop an end-to-end process to ensure more comprehensive support to Service leavers is provided through their Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), National Training Programmes and Employer Engagement Services. This work has included SDS attending CTP careers fairs to highlight to the SDS career services that are available and how they can be accessed by Veterans.

Work is also planned to enhance their digital offers on MyWoW (My World of Work), Apprenticeships.scot and Ourskillsforce where they will have Service leaver-specific information for individuals and employers. Work is scheduled for completion by summer 2017.

### **3. Further and Higher Education**

#### **Recommendation 10 - Veterans Attending College**

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

This is a matter for Colleges Scotland to consider; however the Scottish Government supports this recommendation in principle. The Scottish Funding Council's Outcome Agreements currently ask colleges to remove barriers and support full participation and successful outcomes for all groups of learners in their local community, which includes veterans. With this in mind, the Scottish Government will meet Colleges Scotland in late March 2017 to discuss how to improve engagement with the veterans community.

#### **Recommendation 11 - Modern Apprenticeships**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has already undertaken considerable work to forge relationships with key parties and has committed to work with Scottish Government and relevant partners to develop a plan for the promotion of the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme to Early Service Leavers, veterans who would benefit from up-skilling or retraining, and spouses and partners. The plan will be produced by the end of May 2017.



SDS has already engaged with the Career Transition Partnership, Veterans Scotland and other organisations working with veterans to ensure their service offer is clearly set out and articulated, including how to access Modern Apprenticeships, with regional contacts identified.

Scottish Apprenticeship Week 2017, our largest annual promotional campaign, will take place on 6-10 March which promotes the benefits that apprenticeships bring to the economy, individuals and businesses. This includes a range of events and promotions aimed at employers and young people who may be interested in taking up an apprenticeship, many of which could be of interest to Early Service Leavers and veterans.

### **Recommendation 12 - Sponsorship at College**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation. Work is already underway for employers in Scotland to benefit from a new £10 million Flexible Workforce Development Fund to support in-work training, announced as part of the Scottish Government's response to the UK Government Apprenticeship Levy. The Scottish Government is currently engaging with stakeholders to develop the eligibility criteria for this Fund and will consider including Service leavers and veterans as part of the fund guidance. The Fund will be introduced in autumn 2017.

### **Recommendation 13 - Access Thresholds**

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

This recommendation is for Universities to take forward within the context of the wider work in response to the Commission for Widening Access (CoWA). There are a number of University Scotland work-streams underway to address the CoWA recommendations.

The Scottish Government will ensure that Universities Scotland is aware of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner's recommendations and will request that these are factored into its work relating to access thresholds. As for any group of learners, careful consideration should be given to the specific barriers veterans face when trying to access higher education, and the most appropriate interventions that can assist them.

## **Recommendation 14 - Articulation**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation. The Commission on Widening Access recognised articulation pathways as a distinctive and much admired feature of Scottish post-16 education and a powerful means of advancing fair access. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is currently looking at what it can do to support vulnerable groups within its Access and Inclusion Committee and will consider this recommendation as part of that work. Key to this will be ensuring that adequate data-fields are in place to map progress for veteran learners. In addition to articulation, the SFC-funded Scottish Wider Access Programme, which supports access to higher education for adult learners, already does significant work with veterans.

## **Recommendation 15 - Information about Colleges and Universities**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has agreed to convene an initial meeting with the relevant agencies to agree a plan to produce relevant information and guidance for the veterans community. The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) does not currently tailor information specifically for veterans; however they have agreed to work with the SFC to update the Armed Forces booklet available on their website.

## **Recommendation 16 - Veterans Network/Champions in Colleges and Universities**

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

This is a matter for Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland and their members to consider. The Scottish Government is supportive of work to encourage networks or mentoring to support veterans into and through their studies, and will liaise with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland on this recommendation.

The Scottish Government believes there is great value in maintaining and developing the Scottish Armed Forces and Veterans Champions network established throughout many organisations in the public sector, including all local authorities, NHS Scotland, Police Scotland and other bodies.

#### **4. Looking To The Future**

##### **Recommendation 17 - Parliamentary Scrutiny of Veterans Issues**

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

The Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work is very keen to raise the profile of veterans issues within Parliament and therefore welcomes and accepts this recommendation. The Cabinet Secretary will report to Parliament on the implementation of the Veterans Commissioner's findings on an annual basis, aiming to seek Parliamentary time for a debate to address this every autumn.

##### **Recommendation 18 - Jobs within the Scottish Government**

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

The Scottish Government supports this recommendation. The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the diversity of staff within the organisation and positively values the different perspectives and skills of all our staff. Work is underway with Police Scotland to examine what elements of their model could be adopted, while remaining consistent with the recruitment principles detailed by the Civil Service Commissioners.

The Scottish Government is also seeking to improve awareness of jobs advertised externally with organisations which support Service leavers and veterans into employment. Work is also underway to improve awareness within the Scottish Government's internal recruitment process so that recruiting managers understand the benefits of employing a veteran and, where appropriate, encouraging advertisements to include previous experience in the Services as a desirable criterion.

## **Recommendation 19 - Jobs within NHS Scotland**

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

This is a matter for NHS Scotland and individual Health Boards to consider; however the Scottish Government supports this recommendation in principle. NHS Scotland has a strong track record of employment of Reservists, winning a Gold Award in the Armed Forces Covenant's Employer Recognition Scheme in 2014, and this experience offers a good basis to build on.

Discussions have been held with individual Health Board Employee Directors to consider what more can be done to increase awareness of Service leavers as potential employees. The Armed Forces and Veterans' Joint Group will be convened by the Scottish Government in May this year. Workforce planning will be considered, with Scottish Government workforce policy officials attending the group for the first time to further support veterans employability within the NHS. Volunteers from the group will be sought at this meeting to develop case studies; to help MOD and NHS Employers understand how Armed Forces experiences, skills and qualifications can match across and best help individuals understand the application process.



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