



50+ SERVICE LEAVERS – AN UNTAPPED TALENT POOL

What can employers do to make better use of the skills, knowledge and experience of 50+ Service leavers?

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FOREWORD



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THE VALUE OF THE 50+ SERVICE LEAVER

As the UK economy and labour market continue to adapt and change at a rapid pace, we are witnessing record numbers of vacancies and falling unemployment. While this may be good news for job seekers, employers struggle to fill vacancies, with candidate shortages hampering their ability to fill roles.

As a result, employers are adapting their recruitment methods to become more resourceful in finding people with the right skills and experience. We want to further support employers by signposting them toward a source of skilled workers who are ready and willing to contribute to the across a range of industries.

50+ Service leavers offer employers a rare set of capabilities

People who leave the Armed Forces after 50 have the experience, knowledge and qualifications employers are often looking for in crucial skill shortage areas; engineering, logistics, IT and Cyber. Service leavers have the training and project management skills to deliver a wealth of experience in decision-making, information gathering, assessing risk and leadership. Their dedication and commitment are second to none.

In short, 50+ Service leavers offer employers a rare set of capabilities matched by a work ethos that has been honed and calibrated in unique operating environments.

To access these skilled workers, employers may need to adjust how they find, recruit and develop employees.

Most people leaving military service after 50 transition seamlessly into civilian work, but some can struggle to secure work that matches their capabilities. Some may have found the change from military to civilian life more difficult than expected, while others might feel burnt out after being rejected for jobs they were qualified for. Extra support such as guaranteed job interviews, job trials, mentoring and supplemental training can help 50+ Service leavers secure work to match their skills, experience and capabilities.

We are here to support all Service leavers and veterans at every stage of their civilian employment journey but work best when we collaborate directly with employers and welcome the opportunity to do so. Employers able to think creatively about how they recruit and support this group of skilled workers will find their investment repaid multi-fold.

50+ SERVICE LEAVERS: READY TO WORK

Every year, 1,200 Service people aged fifty years old plus leave the Armed Forces.

Although their military careers are ending, most are not ready to retire. Instead, they want to mobilise their skills, knowledge and experience to start a new career in the civilian world.

50+ Service leavers have many of the skills employers are looking for, such as leadership, decision making, project management and risk management. They bring with them a strong work ethic, self-discipline and a willingness to support team members which, together with a flexible and agile approach to problem-solving, ensures that as a cohort, they are quick at mastering a new brief.

The United Kingdom is facing record levels of skills shortages. Vacancy levels are higher than at any time since the turn of the millennium and one report suggested that 91% of employers struggle to find people with the right skills.¹ Further, employers say that they want to employ people who are not only trained and qualified but also have the right attitudes, including a willingness to work hard, learn, and take on new responsibilities. 50+ Service leavers are among the best trained and most self-disciplined workers in the UK. They represent an attractive pool of talent from which to recruit.

Although 50+ Service leavers have the skills, experience and a 'can-do' attitude required for a variety of vacancies that employers are seeking to fill, connecting them to jobs which match their capabilities can be difficult:

- People who have had long service in the Armed Forces may have last looked for a job decades previously.
- Many are apprehensive about putting themselves out on the job market when it has changed beyond recognition.
- Social media and the internet have shaped the way in which people look for jobs and many 50+ Service leavers face a steep learning curve to familiarise themselves with these channels.
- Networking is a valuable job search tool, but not everybody has networks of friends and family on which to rely.

¹ Open University Business Barometer



1,200

**Regular Service members
aged 50+ leave the
Armed Forces each year**

Employers who focus their recruitment on finding people with previous experience in sectors and organisations similar to their own can miss out on skilled workers from outside their industries, including people who are transitioning out of the Armed Forces. 50+ Service leavers often miss opportunities for jobs which fit their abilities and aspirations, and employers can lose potential skilled workers because of inefficiencies in the job market. Imperfections in the job market could be fixed by small adjustments to the way employers recruit staff.



WHAT DO 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS HAVE TO OFFER?

50+ Service leavers have a wealth of skills, experience, knowledge and capabilities that employers seek and often can be hard to find.

Employers with experience in employing these workers say that their contributions include:

LEADERSHIP

Military leadership is second to none. Officers train to make big significant strategic decisions and to plan how to implement them. The ability to see the 'big picture' is a skill which is needed by organisations, especially those going through major transitions. However, it is not just the training which employers value, but also the experience of Service people of all ranks in making decisions, caring for others, and problem-solving in challenging situations. 50+ Service leavers offer organisations a fresh perspective that can be valuable to businesses embarking on major strategic changes like expanding into a new market or realigning their brand.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Service people have a wealth of experience managing large and often complex engagements and can help organisations in planning, managing, and implementing projects in a variety of contexts. 50+ Service leavers are well trained and experienced to deliver projects on time and within budget. Employers say that they need people with precisely this sort of experience.

ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT

The Armed Forces are made up of large and complex organisational units. 50+ Service leavers have experience in financial, logistical, environmental and people management. Many Service leavers will have supplemented their formal training by gaining additional qualifications ranging from MBA degrees and professional diplomas to certificates of competence to operate equipment or handle dangerous substances. Military training is matched, wherever possible, to the highest relevant level of civilian accreditation.

ENGINEERING

Many 50+ Service leavers have training in mechanical, civil, electrical and other forms of engineering. Almost half of the engineering employers report difficulties in recruiting, and the UK workforce is experiencing a shortfall of 59,000 engineering graduates². At the same time, the Armed Forces is a source for skilled professionals and operate the nation's largest apprenticeship scheme, regularly assessed as Outstanding by Ofsted.

TECHNICAL

Many employers are applying the technical and on-the-job skills that 50+ Service leavers have developed to jobs which need filling in the civilian world. For example, Service people who have previous experience can easily retrain to drive heavy goods vehicles.

RISK MANAGEMENT

People in the Armed Forces need to work in various environments in which decisions are made under pressure and with limited information. 50+ Service people have the training and experience to help businesses manage uncertainty.

² Engineering UK, Key Facts: the State of Engineering 2018

The skills of 50+ Service leavers are not always apparent to employers, especially those with little experience in employing ex-forces personnel. They may also need some training and support to acquire the qualifications and accreditation required to apply their skills in a civilian context. However, organisations like the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) (who help to deliver resettlement on behalf of the MoD) and other organisations, provide help and support for Service leavers to help bridge the gap between military skills and the civilian workplace. A small investment from employers can ultimately pay dividends in terms of accessing valuable skills.



50+ SERVICE LEAVERS: STEREOTYPES VERSUS REALITY

People who leave the military after 50 to embark on a new career say that the biggest barriers they face are negative images of them, both as older workers and as ex-Service people, which do not match reality.

50+ Service leavers recognise that they only have a narrow window of time to catch the attention of prospective employers, and negative stereotypes do not help. Some of the more destructive and inaccurate perceptions which 50+ Service leavers experience include:

MAD, BAD, AND SAD

An especially pernicious misperception of Service people which stretches across generations is that post-traumatic stress disorder is pervasive. Only 3% of military personnel have been diagnosed with a mental health condition³. The ‘mad, bad, and sad’ reflects the environments in which Service people serve rather than the individuals themselves. Most people would find working in a combat zone challenging to say the least. In fact, Service leavers are often more resilient and able to cope better with stress than their civilian equivalents because they bring the experience of working in difficult environments. It is also important to remember that people who are managing a mental health issue, including PTSD, have the capacity to be productive although as a group, they are particularly vulnerable to discrimination.

³ Defence Committee, Mental Health and the Armed Forces, Part One: The Scale of mental health issues, UK Parliament, 2018

BEING REGIMENTED

There is often a misperception that 50+ Service people will carry out tasks in a specific ‘regimented’ way and will be unwilling to adapt to changing circumstances, including working in a civilian environment. Many military tasks do indeed need to be carried out with precision, as small errors can be catastrophic. However, 50+ Service leavers challenge the idea that they are inflexible and point to the wide variety of jobs and locations they are deployed, and their experiences in adapting to working in new environments. They also work in sometimes dangerous and unstable places where flexibility and the ability to recalibrate are essential.

BARKING ORDERS

Employers are sometimes reluctant to employ 50+ Service leavers because they question their ability to assimilate into the work team and perceive those with a military background as wanting to command and control others. Teamworking is an essential skill of military service, and Service people depend on the support, trust and understanding of one another. 50+ Service leavers also have a wealth of experience working across different cultures and have the emotional intelligence needed by organisations which do business in an international environment.

Of course, not all stereotypes of 50+ Service leavers are negative. Employers often think of them as dedicated to their work, having integrity and a strong work ethos, and being willing to put in the extra effort. It is important for employers to see the individual and not just the uniform to help understand the values they offer.



WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO MAKE BETTER USE OF THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS?

As part of the research for the project, civilian managers were surveyed to gather their views on employing people who were leaving the Armed Forces, mid-career.

60%
of employers said their businesses had little to no experience in employing 50+ Service people

Most were positive about employing 50+ Service people, but 60% said their businesses had little to no experience in doing so. Many wanted to know what they could do to better tap into the talent available from the Armed Forces.

Almost nine thousand employers are members of the Armed Forces Covenant, a pledge by businesses, government, charities and individuals to support Service people, including Service leavers seeking civilian work. Many employers signed the pledge or are preparing to do so, but all employers can follow the principles of being a Forces Friendly Employer⁴.

Steps which can be taken include:

- Advertising in Service friendly recruitment sites.
- Organising insight days so that Service leavers can learn about job opportunities.
- Matching military skills to those needed by the organisation.
- Accommodating work patterns which military reservists need for training and deployments.

This last point is particularly important to many 50+ Service leavers who have maintained their links with the military community by enlisting as Reservists after transition. 50+ Service leavers also mentioned the following ways in which employers could help people like them in making a successful move into work which they value:

⁴ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/support-and-advice/businesses/>

BE FLEXIBLE

One frustration expressed by several 50+ Service leavers was the experience of securing a job early in their transition only for it to be rescinded because the employer could not wait for them to complete their military service. Most employers have some experience in managing the transition of a new employee who needs time to, for example, give notice to their previous employer, manage a family issue or relocate. These principles can be applied to 50+ Service leavers who may need some flexibility as they complete a deployment.

CONDUCT A TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AUDIT

Most organisations have experience acquiring workers with skills from different sectors so matching those skills to the requirements of the job is not new. Resources are available from organisations like CTP⁵ to better understand the skills which are available from the Armed Forces, how they can be applied in a civilian context and what top-up training and qualifications would be needed to bridge the two.

PROVIDE JOB PLACEMENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Many 50+ Service leavers say they value spending time in workplaces to which they are seeking employment. Job placements can give them real life experience of work which they may have been thinking about taking up for a long time.

PROVIDE A MENTOR

Having a mentor, for example, another Service leaver, can help people transitioning out of the Armed Forces in adapting to a new work environment.

⁵ <https://www.ctp.org.uk/employers>



SUPPORT SELF-EMPLOYED SERVICE LEAVERS

Not everybody who leaves the Armed Forces mid-career wants employment. Some are hoping to develop their own businesses or work in a portfolio arrangement on behalf of more than one client. For some, self-employment can give them more control of their working lives and allow them to be their own boss. Some may choose self-employment because they have something unique to offer businesses. While self-employment can be rewarding, it can take time to build a network from which to draw clients. Employers could assist self-employed Service leavers by facilitating opportunities for the Service leaver to tell others what they have to offer.

TALK TO 50+ SERVICE LEAVERS WHOSE SKILLS MATCH THE JOB

Many employers offer guaranteed job interviews to all Service leavers whose skills match the requirements of the job being advertised. Guaranteed job interviews are not about advantaging veterans over job applicants. Rather, employers who offer them recognise that veterans have skills and knowledge that the employer can tap into, but those benefits might not be apparent in the short-listing process alone. Giving 50+ Service leavers the chance to talk with the person who is hiring (whether or not it is through a guaranteed interview) gives them the chance to discuss what they have to offer the organisation.



INCORPORATE AGE AND MILITARY STATUS INTO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

50+ Service leavers recognise that military status is not a protected characteristic (though age is), but many have experienced direct and indirect forms of discrimination. Such experiences are not only unfair, but they can knock the confidence out of someone who is entering the job market after being out of it for a long time. Organisations can apply the good practices in diversity and inclusion to identify and eliminate forms of discrimination faced by 50+ Service leavers.

A CALL FOR ACTION:

50+ Service leavers have a lot to offer civilian workplaces but might need some support in building careers which match their skills and abilities. As an employer which values veterans, you can:

- Review your recruitment and selection processes to ensure 50+ Service leavers face a level playing field when applying for work.
- Consider measures to support veterans, including 50+ Service leavers, in building their careers with your organisation.
- Spread the word about the benefits of recruiting 50+ Service leavers with customers, business partners and others who are looking to recruit talented, skilled and dedicated workers.



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