

# Summary of National Audit Office report: Ministry of Defence: Leaving the Services

6 August 2007

## Introduction

The National Audit Office (NAO) has recently released a fairly complimentary report on the resettlement services provided by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to personnel leaving all three Services. This briefing aims to summarise the reports' findings and highlight some of its recommendations.

The authors of the report conducted a survey of 38,000 individuals who left the Services in the two years prior to October 2006. This achieved a response rate of 12%. They also performed an assessment of the services provided by the MoD and its resettlement policies.

Lastly, the authors looked at other nations' resettlement provision. Compared to the arrangements in countries including the USA, Canada, France and Australia, MoD provision was considered to be at the forefront. Indeed, a number of countries have approached the MoD for advice on replicating the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) service.

The NAO found that for the majority of Service Leavers a good and satisfactory all round package is provided. The main exceptions to this were found to be Early Service Leavers (ESLs) and a small number of individuals who were unable to make full use of the resettlement activities due to operational pressure.

In regards to the overall experience of Service Leavers, nearly three quarters reported finding the return to civilian life as expected or easier. Those that served a shorter time found the transition most difficult. They found that a small number of Service Leavers do experience homelessness.

## Employment

74% of survey respondents were in full time employment, 7% part time, 5 % were in education, 3% retired and 6% unemployed and seeking work. MoD research from the period found similar results. These figures are in broad agreement with the population as a whole where 74% are in employment and 5.5% unemployed and seeking work. Approximately half of Service Leavers had a job to go to on discharge with the majority securing employment within six months.



## Career Transition Partnership (CTP)

The take up rate of the CTP has increased since its inception in 1998 from 56% to 91%. Overall satisfaction with the services provided was good. The elements that were most appreciated were the 'CV writing' and 'Interview Technique' training, both gaining approximately 80% approval. Again 80% of respondents felt that the provision of 35 working days of Graduated Resettlement Time, allowing time for job applications, searching for housing etc., was valuable.

A number of reasons were given by the 9% who did not attend the CTP including lack of awareness and simply choosing not to.

A small number of Service Leavers reported not attending as a result of work pressure. It is generally accepted that the Armed Forces has been operating at or above its ideal capacity in recent years. The resulting increased demand on personnel means that whilst the majority of Service Leavers are spending their final six months in the UK as required under MoD guidelines some are struggling to fit in their allocated resettlement time.

The report notes that action was taken in March 2006 by the MoD to strengthen Service Leavers' rights to take time off for this issue, but some concerns still exist. It is thought that the ability to get time off for resettlement varies across the Service depending on factors such as rank, the Service Leavers' relationship with their Unit and the priority given by the Unit to resettlement.

## Early Service Leavers (ESLs)

Early Service Leavers (ESLs), those who have served less than four years or are compulsorily discharged, were found to receive an inconsistent service. This group includes the potentially more vulnerable individuals. They tend to leave with short notice after failing to complete the basic military training and so return to civilian life with few acquired skills and qualifications. Only in exceptional circumstances do they qualify for a limited access to CTP services.

ESLs receive a resettlement briefing from first-line Resettlement Officers (the report also highlighted that the quality of service provided by first-line officers needed to improve) and there was concern that these staff may not have the skills or training to identify to establish if an ESL is at risk of social exclusion. The survey found that only 63% of ESLs had actually received this briefing and of those only about half found it useful. With 16% of ESLs reported themselves as unemployed six months after leaving, compared to 6% of all Service Leavers, there is concern that the needs of this group are not being met adequately.

## Individual Resettlement Training Costs

Whilst a large majority of Service Leavers found the Individual Resettlement Training Costs grant useful there was significant dissatisfaction with the amount available. The rate of £534 has remained the same since introduction in 1993, reducing its real term value by 33% and limiting the amount of training that can be purchased. The MoD does intend to increase this to £1,018 by April 2008 on a cost neutral basis by increasing the amount of training provided locally and so achieving reduction in subsistence and travel expenses.

## Finding Accommodation

Overall, the NAO found that the MoD provides a reasonable level of support to Service Leavers seeking accommodation but it could do more to identify those who are more likely to be at risk of homelessness and to signpost them to the necessary support.

The MoD has been working in recent years to help improve serving and ex-Serving individuals to access to home ownership and social housing. The MoDs' Long Service Advance of Pay scheme allows those with four years service to borrow £8,500 interest free to assist with the purchase of a home. Over the last 10 years 22,800 personnel have used this scheme and feedback on it was largely positive. The MoD has also managed to have the definition of 'Key Worker' widened to include certain Armed Forces personnel to enable entitlement to shared ownership schemes and Key Worker housing. There has also been some success with the recently announced change in the 'Local Connection' rules that should remove one barrier to personnel accessing social housing.

The MoD runs the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO) to provide personnel with information about housing opportunities prior to a return to civilian life. Feedback from the 12% of Service Leavers making use of the service was largely positive. The majority of those that did not attend were not in need of advice but 18% were simply not aware of the service.

Again the report was concerned with the treatment received by ESLs. Since the introduction of the ESL's Initiative in 2004 all such individuals are required to have a one-to-one interview with a Resettlement Officer to assess their vulnerability to social exclusion. The report highlighted concern that not everyone who perhaps ought to be is receiving a referral to the Single Persons Accommodation Centre (SPACE) since the initiative was introduced. More robust probing of Service Leavers' future accommodation plans and better signposting of services is recommended.

Overall the survey found that 5%, mostly young and of junior rank, of Service Leavers had experienced homelessness (including staying with friends). The majority, 51%, had been homeless between one and six months, 14% between seven and 12 months and 12% for over one year.

## Recommendations for the MoD include:

- Further investigation into whether an appropriate balance between operational work and Service Leavers entitlement to resettlement is being achieved.
- Further strengthening of support available to Early Service Leavers and more effective referrals to Single Persons Accommodation Centre for the Ex-Services (SPACES).
- Improvement in the quality of first line support in the Army including implementing a new quality assurance manual, reorganisation of first line staff and improved training.
- Monitoring of the resettlement outcomes of Early Service Leavers.
- Improvement in the take up of resettlement support amongst the Service Leavers that are currently not engaging.
- Continuing to monitor the impact of the current and planned schemes aimed at increasing homeownership amongst serving personnel.

- Continuing to talk to the Department for Communities and Local Government to improve services provided to statutory homeless Service Leavers. Areas to concentrate on are reducing the incidents of local authorities requiring possession proceedings before accepting that homelessness exists.
- Widening the range of financial training provided to include practical advice on household budgeting and debt.
- Using the new Sickness Management System (SAM) to identify early on those personnel who are to be discharged medically.

## Further information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.nao.org.uk/pn/06-07/0607618.htm>. If you would like any further details on this issue, or have any questions please contact Daniel Martin, Public Policy Unit on 020 7973 7353 or email [dmartin@britishlegion.org.uk](mailto:dmartin@britishlegion.org.uk).