



Employing Military Spouses

A Guide for Employers

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Produced in association with Recruit for Spouses



Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Business Case.....	1
3. Facts & Figures.....	2
4. The Armed Forces Covenant.....	5
5. The Role of Unconscious Bias.....	5
6. Supporting Military Spouses in Recruitment.....	6
7. Supporting Military Spouses in Employment.....	7
8. Summary.....	10
9. Additional Support	10
10. Further Reading.....	11

1. Introduction

The UK has approximately 57,000 military spouses¹ with the important job of supporting a partner in the armed forces, which often involves following their partner around the country or further afield. Whilst this support is invaluable, most spouses will also take on other paid employment to fulfill their own ambitions and provide their family with an essential second income.

However, finding fulfilling roles can be difficult as employers and recruitment agencies may make assumptions about the commitment of a forces' spouse, assuming that short-term postings and lack of support lead to an unreliable and transient worker.

It is true that some military spouses will have to move away but recent changes throughout the British military mean its families are more settled than ever before, and workers may not move as often or with as short notice as some people might assume. In reality, military spouses may not move jobs any more than civilian workers.

Pre-conceptions about military spouses can result in the exclusion of a talented group of people, and employers cannot afford to limit the talent pool in any way.

Organisations should consider that by their nature, military spouses are adaptable and resourceful, capable of forging good relationships in a fast-changing environment. They are loyal, dedicated with a strong work ethic and often have a local support network from other military families that civilians do not. These are skills and advantages, which are required in a modern business, making forces' spouses an asset.

A good employer will ensure that the spouses of the British Armed Forces are treated equally during the recruitment process and once employed, are given the support required to succeed. This guide, written with the support and guidance of Recruit for Spouses, describes the actions enei and Recruit for Spouses recommend to achieve this.

2. Business Case

There are clear business benefits of accessing the skills and experience within military communities. These include²:

- Access to a largely untapped resource
- A workforce which may be particularly interested in flexible, part time and 'seasonal' work – a flexibility which will become ever more valuable in the domestic and global economic environment of the future
- Interesting and diverse skill sets including language skills
- Recruiting people who can be reached relatively easily in terms of targeted advertising

¹ www.recruitforspouses.co.uk

² Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce Reports March 2010

Military spouses have often developed skills such as adaptability, resourcefulness and communication, as a result of their association with the military. In addition, those who recruit, retain and advance military-affiliated employees will benefit from supporting the British Armed Forces.

There are additional advantages for organisations tendering for work with the Ministry of Defence (MOD). Since December 2013, the MOD have encouraged all organisations bidding for MOD contracts to support a number of personnel objectives including:

- Employment of service leavers
- Employment of wounded, injured or sick veterans
- Employment of the spouses and partners of service personnel
- Helping local cadet units
- Support to Reservist employees
- Encouragement of Reserve service

Whilst this is currently outside of the tender evaluation itself, it shows recognition from the MOD that suppliers should support the spouses of service personnel.

3. Facts & Figures

There are approximately 57,000 military partners in the UK, excluding reservists³.

There is not a clear profile of military spouses in the UK, but the Ministry of Defence (MOD), Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey⁴ does collect some limited information. In the latest survey it found that:

- The proportion of spouses employed continues to increase; from 68% in 2014 to 75% in 2016.
- The proportion of spouses looking for a new job over the last 12 months remains unchanged (39%). The majority of these (69%) experienced difficulties finding a job.
- Army spouses are more likely than Royal Navy/Royal Marine and RAF spouses to be looking for employment and to have experienced difficulties.
- The proportion of all spouses in full-time employment has increased by three percentage points to 44% since 2015.
- The RAF continues to have the highest proportion of spouses in full-time employment (50%) while the Army have the lowest (40%). The proportion of spouses in part-time employment (26%) or self-employed (6%) has remained unchanged from 2015.

³ www.recruitforspouses.co.uk

⁴ Ministry of Defence (MOD), Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2016, London: MOD, July 2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540808/Tri-Service_Families_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2016_Main_Report.pdf

- One quarter of Service spouses are not in employment. 7% of spouses are not employed but seeking employment. Army spouses have the highest proportion seeking employment (9%) compared to RAF (5%) and RN/RM (4%) spouses.
- Three quarters of spouses in full-time employment are satisfied with their job overall. The Army continues to have the lowest proportion of spouses in full-time employment (40%) while the RAF continues to have the highest (50%).
- Many of those in employment are in jobs that do not fully utilise their skill set. Only 72% of full time workers are satisfied that their job matches their skills and experience. This falls to 60% of part time workers.
- The most common difficulties in finding suitable employment were due to their spouse often being away, and their spouse being in the Armed Forces.
- 28% of Service families moved for Service reasons. The proportion of families accompanying their spouse overseas has dropped to 12% in 2015.
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of spouses live separately to the household member who is serving in the Armed Forces (serving spouse) during the working week.

We also know that in the 12 months leading to April 2016, 16,540 regular personnel left the Armed Forces, with 59% citing the impact of service upon their family and personal relationships as the primary motivation⁵. This demonstrates the significant impact that spousal stability, including employment has on national security.

The infographic below has been prepared by Recruit for Spouses to demonstrate the profile of military spouses.

⁵ www.recruitforspouses.co.uk

The Military Spouse in 2016.....

RECRUIT FOR SPOUSES



According to the MoD there are currently at least **57,000** spouses of active - duty UK military personnel (this does not include the spouses of Reservists).

98% are women



83% have children



45% have degrees and
35% have professional qualifications



70% have management experience

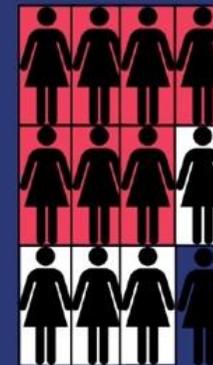


$$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$$

71% have either A levels or an NVQ



55% will move house within the next 2 years



84% of mil spouses would like to be working but only **58%** are

42% of military spouses are not in the work force

1986 was the last time that employment levels for women in the civilian population were at similar levels

1 in 3 suffer mental health problems



Source: Grassroots survey of 2,062 UK military spouses Aug/Sep 2016

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4. The Armed Forces Covenant

The introduction of the Armed Forces Covenant ⁶in 2011 has formalised the nation's moral obligation to those who serve, have served, their families and the bereaved, and guaranteed them fairness in the provision of public and commercial services.

The armed forces covenant sets out the relationship between the nation, the government and the armed forces. It recognises that the whole nation has a moral obligation to members of the armed forces and their families, and it establishes how they should expect to be treated.

The covenant's 2 principles are that:

- The armed forces community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services
- Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved

The covenant exists to redress the disadvantages that the armed forces community may face in comparison to other citizens, and to recognise sacrifices made.

The Armed Forces Covenant encourages local authorities (all local authorities in the UK have now signed the Covenant) to support the armed forces community in their areas and promote public understanding and awareness. The Armed Forces, including Reserve and Cadet Forces, are also increasing their efforts to engage with and integrate in the communities in which they are located. In addition, over 1,500 businesses and other organisations have signed the Covenant pledge and made a range of specific pledges to support the armed forces community.

5. The Role of Unconscious Bias

The business case for diversity is partly based on the notion that organisational processes are fair and accessible to all. However, it is clear that to some extent we all feel some bias unconsciously affects our interactions with other people.

We are all vulnerable to the influence of deeply held views and ideas, which create unconscious bias. We use stereotypes as shorthand to make generalisations about people rather than having to interpret each interaction from scratch. Some are conscious and some are not.

The challenge is recognising bias when it happens, particularly in the workplace to ensure a variety of different people with different perspectives and ideas run the organisation. The

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-armed-forces-covenant/2010-to-2015-government-policy-armed-forces-covenant-appendix-4-armed-forces-covenant>

onus is on all of us to stamp out lazy stereotyping and instead to listen and interact with individuals without relying on unfounded generalisations.

Some people will have conscious or unconscious bias about military spouses, which could lead them to make poor decisions, affecting the success of the organisation. This should be addressed to ensure fairness and business success.

6. Supporting Military Spouses in Recruitment

The challenges that military spouses face during recruitment include⁷:

- Reluctance among some employers to employ applicants from military families, often as a result of negative perceptions about the level of commitment that they can give to an employer and which, in turn, can lead to detrimental impacts upon peoples' self-esteem and confidence
- Gaps in CV histories (e.g. whilst stationed overseas or in remote areas of the UK)

Recruitment and selection is a high-risk area for employers due to discrimination and stereotyping. Changing recruitment policies and practices to make them more inclusive will ensure a range of different people can access the opportunities.

Job Design and Person Specification

- Ensure that the Person Specification and Job Description is free from bias – remove all unnecessary requirements that simply act as job filters or ways of narrowing the talent pool.
- Think about what the person needs to do in the role, or the behaviours they need to display, and when describing it, choose the words carefully. Focus on the tasks that will be completed rather than using the existing jobholder as the model.

Advertising

- All opportunities should be advertised widely, both internally and externally, using a range of different methods to reach people from different backgrounds. Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) may be useful in addition to traditional methods.
- Consider providing military spouses with better visibility of opportunities – advertise vacancies on job sites for military spouses (see section 8 for more information).

Application

- Use a simple, easy-to-use bias free application form (see enei website for more details).
- Consider the information requested from your candidates at the application stage to ensure that the approach cannot be considered to be discriminatory.

⁷ Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce Reports March 2010

- Some people may have gaps in their working history. Clarify the 'previous employment' section with a sentence that recognises not everyone's 'career path' follows a straightforward route, and that this is ok.

Selection

- Sifting and selection of candidates needs to be based on competence, capability, skill, ability and relevant experience.
- Have an open mind when it comes to selection criteria, including grades, training and education history. Where possible, focus on the skills required to do the job rather than formal qualifications and training because this could create unnecessary barriers. Consider which skills can be developed on the job and therefore aren't essential for candidates at application stage.
- Train those involved in selection processes to make sure they are aware of unconscious bias and the importance of being non-discriminatory when it comes to military backgrounds. Make sure they know what is relevant, when it comes to decision making, and what should not be considered.
- Interviews should be based on competence, ability, strengths, skill and potential.
- In many US states it is illegal to ask if a spouse is in the military, to avoid discrimination. In the UK, there is no legislation to prevent unfair treatment but it is best practice to create an environment where people can be open and honest about their circumstances, without fear of reprisal, so that the employer can seek to support them.
- Interviewers should use a standard set of questions as far as possible and results should be noted on a standard score sheet. It is essential to keep accurate records of interviews; we recommend that these be archived for at least 12 months.
- Ensure the recruitment process is fair and transparent and make decisions based on ability and potential rather than background or address.
- Consider if and how social media will be used in recruitment practices, as it will contain personal information and views that could consciously or unconsciously affect decisions.

Recruitment Agencies

- Ensure recruitment agencies are aware of the selection criteria and approach to military spouses. Without direction from their clients, there will be little motivation for recruitment agencies to field a wide range of talented candidates. Embed diversity targets within contracts to ensure that recruitment agencies broaden their search and selection activities.

7. Supporting Military Spouses in Employment

Military spouses face many of the same career challenges as civilians, including finding affordable childcare and job progression in their chosen fields but they face additional obstacles specific to the military lifestyle.

The challenges and barriers that Service families face in progressing their careers and accessing further education and training include⁸:

- Frequent mobility, which makes it difficult to build up experience and skills and interrupts training/education.
- Pressures placed upon those with young children by their distance from family support networks.
- Pressures placed upon Service families with young children through the frequent absence of serving partners, often at short notice.
- Lack of supporting infrastructure – e.g. inadequate access to employment and services from remote bases and difficulties in accessing adequate and affordable childcare.

However, employers can take action to eliminate these issues.

Culture

- Encourage all employees to talk to their line manager honestly and openly about any issues they may have.
- Review attitudes of management and line managers and challenge those that believe military spouses are not committed enough to be employed by the organisation.
- Challenge a culture in which commitment is equated with long hours at work and rewards are measured solely by productivity outcomes.

Flexible Working

- All employees with a minimum of 26 weeks' continuous service have a statutory right to request flexible working, which includes flexible working that can be achieved within full time working hours or by a reduction in hours. Options include:
 - Home working- either for all or part of the total working hours
 - Part time work or job share
 - Flexible working hours, which can be as simple as having a flexible start and finish time to suit both the business and the employee
 - Accumulated extra hours, which can be 'banked' for school holidays, inset days, sports day, school productions or medical appointments
- Whilst many military spouses will already be eligible to apply, the best employers extend the right to cover all staff with no minimum length of service criteria.

Work Life Balance

- Employees with a minimum of one year's service who have children or adopted children under the age of 18 are entitled to take up to 18 weeks' unpaid time off work to look after them, with a statutory limit of 4 weeks per child in any one year. Enhanced policies can extend the length of leave, introduce an element of pay, allow more flexibility in the way leave can be used by allowing single days to be taken or increase/remove the maximum limit of 4 weeks per year.

⁸ Service Families Employment and Skills Taskforce Reports March 2010

- Parents and others with dependents are able to take unpaid time off work to deal with an emergency. The best employers allow some paid time off for family emergencies.
- Unpaid career breaks can allow an individual to temporarily move home, whilst maintaining continuity of service with an agreed return date. Good employers should also be understanding of the pressures on military spouses to take annual leave at times which will allow them to spend time with their partners whilst on R&R from overseas tours.

Reward

- Flexible benefit schemes allow employees to decide how they would prefer to be rewarded. Employers can allow employees to buy additional holiday from their normal salary, which is paid for across the full year. This provides a regular reduced income and additional leave, which can be used for any purpose including emergencies.

Performance Management and Career Development

- Ensure military spouses receive the same level and commitment to development as all other staff. Don't make assumptions about a lack of long-term commitment.
- Ensure that managers use regular one to ones and performance conversations to discuss strengths, development needs and the support available to complete effective development plans.
- Make sure line managers discuss learning opportunities and future aspirations with all of their employees and avoid making assumptions.
- In addition to training on the performance management process, line managers should be trained on diversity and the role of unconscious bias to avoid stereotyping and bias limiting career planning and opportunities for certain people.
- Consider the use of Mentoring programmes to support military spouses.

Training

- Provide a range of training programmes for people throughout the organisation, focusing on the talent and potential at all levels.
- Make sure all staff are aware of training opportunities and any funding and support available to help them participate. Do not make assumptions about who might be interested.
- Training and meetings should be scheduled to start in normal working hours and preferably during term time. Work events which start early, finish late, are during school holidays or residential can place an unnecessary burden on military families.
- The best employers consider the normal working hours of employees and school holiday periods when organising training, courses or meetings. They also provide employees with as much notice as possible to enable employees to make alternative arrangements, such as child care, should the need arise.
- N.B. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) have made changes to the vocational qualifications system to provide flexible and 'portable' qualifications for all learners. This will help Service families to continue their learning and achieve qualifications when they move to a new geographical area.

Commit to Being Armed Forces Friendly

- Organisations can demonstrate their commitment to Military Spouses by adopting and advertising an Armed Forces Family Friendly Policy.
- Organisations wishing to go one step further can sign the corporate covenant (mentioned in section 4). This is a voluntary pledge from organisations to express their support for the Armed Forces, and commit to ways in which they can provide that support. Each organisation will also be encouraged to offer support in a way most appropriate to their situation and capacity, with the pledge document including a 'menu' of options for them to sign up to. This menu covers employment support for veterans, reservists, service spouses and partners, as well as support for cadet units, Armed Forces Day, and discounts for the armed forces community. There is also an opportunity for organisations to add their own commitments based on local circumstances. For more information visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/fulfilling-the-commitments-of-the-armed-forces-covenant/supporting-pages/corporate-covenant> or:
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/3760/6> for Scotland.
- Apply for the Military Spouses Business and Employment Charter Mark. Just as the Armed Forces Covenant sets out the relationship between the Nation, the State and the Armed Forces, this Charter has been written to enable employers to understand the obstacles that need to be addressed in relation to spouses of those who serve in the UK Armed Forces. For more information visit
<http://www.recruitforspouses.co.uk/charter.asp>

8. Summary

Although HR departments can review policies and procedures to ensure they are supportive to military families, the greatest support will come from creating a culture where everyone is treated as an individual and staff can talk openly and honestly about their own specific challenges with their line manager, with a view to finding a solution that works for both them and the business.

9. Additional Support

Recruit for Spouses <http://www.recruitforspouses.co.uk>

Recruit for Spouses is an award winning Recruitment business with access to thousands of military spouses across the UK, through their established networks. They offer a recruitment solution for businesses small and large to access this untapped pool of talent.

Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champions

The Jobcentre Plus Armed Forces Champions are part of a package of measures to support the families of Service personnel, agreed as part of the Armed Forces Covenant. There are approximately 50 champions and they are a key link between Jobcentre Plus and the Armed Forces community, and the main point of contact for the Armed Forces to tackle issues relating to employment and work-related benefits, such as Jobseeker's Allowance.

SORTED! <http://www.sorted.org.uk>

Service Families Employment Scheme <http://www.civvystreet.org/employers/>

Army Families Federation <http://www.aff.org.uk>

RAF Families Federation <http://www.raf-ff.org.uk>

Naval Families Federation <http://www.nff.org.uk>

10. Further Reading

<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/military-families-and-transition>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-armed-forces-covenant/2010-to-2015-government-policy-armed-forces-covenant>



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This information was correct at the time of publication.