

Research into the Employment Needs of Disabled and Vulnerable Veterans in Scotland

Poppyscotland

Executive Summary

**Norma Hurley
Douglas White
Jenny Eaves**

March 2009

1 Melville Park, Edinburgh, EH28 8PJ
PH: 44(0)131 335 3700 FX 44(0)131 333 1033
admin@blakestevenson.co.uk www.blakestevenson.co.uk

Crane House, 19 Apex Business Park, Annitsford, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE23 7BF
PH: 44(0)0191 250 1969 FX: 44(0)191 250 2563

Directors: Norma Hurley and Glenys Watt

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our Steering Group at Poppyscotland, and in particular the Head of Charitable Services, for their advice, guidance and support in carrying out this research. We would also like to thank the representatives of all the veterans' organisations who participated in the study. Finally, we are very grateful to the individual veterans who gave us their time and their views, through focus groups and by replying to our survey.

This project was funded by a grant from the MacRobert Trust

The Research Study

In June 2008 Poppyscotland commissioned Blake Stevenson, in association with ECOTEC, to undertake a research study into the employment needs of veterans with disabilities and vulnerabilities across Scotland.

- The overarching aim of the study was to provide recommendations to help Poppyscotland and other relevant organisations better shape their services to help meet the employment needs of disabled and vulnerable veterans.

Research methods used included:

- Desk-research
- Survey and interviews with veterans' organisations
- Questionnaire survey of veterans
- Focus groups with veterans
- Interviews with key informants from organisations working with vulnerable individuals
- Analysis and report writing

Information collected, reviewed and analysed includes:

- statistical data from Defence Analytical Statistics Agency (DASA) on the age, location, and condition suffered, of all veterans in Scotland receiving compensation under the War Pensions Scheme and the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme;
- research into what happens to veterans when they leave the Forces, including the different needs that they may have and how these needs can best be met;
- research into the relationship between employment, employability and a range of potential barriers to work including health problems, mental health issues, disability, homelessness, and particular life events;
- information and reports on the impact and effectiveness of employment initiatives aimed at individuals with specific disabilities or vulnerabilities;

- policy documents on government strategies and programmes for the achievement of employment outcomes – including those programmes aimed at disabled or vulnerable groups; and
- policy documents on the government’s approach to veterans.

Survey and interviews with veterans’ organisations

This part of the research comprised:

a) an electronic and paper based survey of all Veterans Scotland member organisations. The survey was sent to all the member charities of Veterans Scotland, and 17 completed surveys were received.

b) telephone and face-to-face interviews with representatives from key organisations;

- Poppyscotland
 - Regular Forces Employment Association
 - Officers Association Scotland
 - Service Personnel and Veterans Agency
 - Lord Roberts Workshop
 - Lady Haig’s Poppy Factory
 - Erskine
 - Royal British Legion Scotland
 - Combat Stress
 - Scottish Veterans’ Residencies
 - Scottish War Blinded
 - BLESMA
- c) two consultation meetings with relevant stakeholder organisations, with expert knowledge in the area of disabled and vulnerable veterans

Survey of veterans

We undertook a survey of veterans in Scotland to gather their views and experiences on the barriers that ex-service personnel can face when accessing employment, and to provide them with an opportunity to identify how these barriers might best be tackled.

A total of 389 completed surveys were received. Of these 207 were from Scotland and 182 were from the rest of the UK.

Focus groups with veterans

We carried out focus group discussions with veterans to gather their views on the key issues involved in the research, thereby providing valuable qualitative data.

Interviews with key informants working with vulnerable individuals

To gather information on the range of support needs that veterans may have, we undertook telephone interviews with a sample of key informants in agencies working with vulnerable people:

- Frontline Fife
- Edinburgh Cyrenians
- Breathing Space
- Alcohol Support Aberdeen
- A4E
- Jobcentre Plus, Disability Employment Advisor
- Pathways to Work, NHS Condition Management Programme

Mapping of supported employment

One of the objectives of the research study was to undertake a mapping exercise of supported employment activity in Scotland, in order to inform the work of Poppyscotland and partner organisations in this area.

Whilst some work was completed as part of this research Poppyscotland is planning to carry out further research following on from this report to more fully inform its future strategy in this area.

It is however understood, as a result of recent research commissioned by the Scottish Government, that in general local authority supported employment providers do not record whether individuals are veterans.

The Policy Context

The research study has taken place at an important and pertinent juncture, with veterans' rights and the delivery of employment support services both issues that are high on the political agenda.

In terms of veterans, both the UK and the Scottish Government have recently established strategic groups involving a range of departments, political parties and ex-Service organisations to consider the needs and experiences of veterans. There are now clear routes and mechanisms through which veterans' interests – including interests in relation to employment – can be promoted in government policy circles.

Research Findings

Levels of worklessness amongst veterans in Scotland

There is a lack of comprehensive data available on the level of unemployment and economic inactivity amongst ex-service personnel in Scotland and in the UK. This information is not routinely collected by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), or by Jobcentre Plus and other employment service providers.

This is a significant gap as this data is required to build an accurate picture of the scale of the workless population amongst veterans, and to identify the nature of this client group – i.e. what benefits are they receiving, what are their prospects of returning to work, etc. If activity to support disabled and vulnerable veterans back to employment is to be properly tracked and assessed then this data is essential.

In the absence of robust government data on the size of the workless veteran population in Scotland other data sources can be used to try and build a picture of this group.

It is estimated that there are 189,000 veterans of working age in Scotland. Of these approximately 28,000 may be out of work. This figure is based on numbers claiming benefit, and previous research studies on levels of worklessness amongst veterans. It may be an underestimate as the rate for veterans claiming incapacity and other non-work related benefits is potentially higher than the rate for the general population.

Not all veterans who are out of work are vulnerable and in need of additional support. It is also the case that some of those on incapacity and other non-work benefits have a limited capacity to move towards employment or other positive outcomes.

Barriers to employment for veterans

The study revealed that whilst many veterans make a successful transition from life in the Forces to civilian life, a minority find this change extremely challenging and encounter significant difficulties and problems in doing so.

In terms of making the adjustment from being in the Forces to finding and sustaining civilian employment, veterans often encounter a number of problems. Some of these problems are directly related to how the civilian labour market operates and veterans' ability to adapt to and function in this environment. These differences include veterans' awareness of how to identify and access appropriate job opportunities; their ability to interpret the skills they have developed in the military and sell these to an employer; their capacity to identify and acquire the new skills they may require; and employers' knowledge and understanding of the attributes and approach to work that veterans can bring.

Challenges such as these are experienced by many veterans, and not only those who are disabled or vulnerable. However those veterans who are experiencing significant problems in other areas of their lives are likely to find these labour market barriers particularly challenging, and their capacity to address these barriers is likely to be reduced.

The significant problems in other areas of their lives that a minority of veterans experience, are complex, inter-related and wide-ranging. They encompass varied and difficult issues including social isolation, disability, mental health issues, homelessness, financial problems, substance misuse, and engagement in criminal activity.

For each of these issues the research study found compelling evidence of the significant and specific impact that these can have on veterans. The reasons why some veterans may be susceptible to such problems appear to be closely linked to negative experiences they have had in the Forces alongside major difficulties in adjusting to civilian life. The evidence suggests that the prevalence of mental health difficulties appears to be increasing amongst ex-service personnel, whilst it is also evident that Early Service Leavers can be particularly susceptible to many of the problems listed above.

Central to the understanding of the difficulties that vulnerable veterans experience is that each issue rarely exists in isolation. Veterans who are suffering one of these difficulties are usually experiencing multiple problems. There are no clear rules or patterns as to which problems may occur first, and the emergence of any one of these problems can often trigger or exacerbate other issues. Whilst these issues act as major obstacles to individuals finding work, the experience of losing a job can itself also cause or lead to some of these problems developing.

Given that these issues do not exist in isolation it is clear that they cannot be tackled in isolation. A holistic, joined-up approach is needed to help vulnerable veterans address the range of difficulties that they might have and support them towards employment and the labour market.

Current employment services available to veterans

There is a plethora of employment services currently available to service leavers and veterans in Scotland. These include the packages of support offered through the Ministry of Defence by the Careers Transition Partnership (CTP), government employment programmes and initiatives, and services offered by veterans' organisations.

This range of services and programmes is useful, and clearly there are services there that can be accessed by disabled and vulnerable veterans to help them move towards employment.

However the research identified that gaps or difficulties do exist in relation to this service provision, particularly in relation to disabled and vulnerable veterans, which can limit the extent to which the services can help these veterans to tackle the wide-ranging barriers to employment that they might be experiencing.

Generic gaps across this provision include:

- there is a limited number of services which take a holistic and all-encompassing approach to helping veterans access employment – although it is encouraging that the new Veterans' First Point pilot Edinburgh will seek to link veterans' in with the range of service providers they might require.
- few services are available to support veterans to understand and adjust to the significant cultural shift from life in the Forces to civilian life.
- there is a lack of employability projects that specifically reach out and target vulnerable veterans, make them aware of the opportunities available and encourage them to access support.

There are also some specific limitations in relation to the different types of employment services available:

- there is insufficient preparation by the MOD, prior to service personnel leaving the Forces, to enable them to adjust appropriately to life in the community and to find employment;

- the services offered through the CTP are important because they are delivered by locally based ex-service personnel who have a clear understanding of veterans' issues and of relevant employment opportunities in their geographical area. However, there are concerns that the most vulnerable veterans may not access the services provided by the CTP, whilst the local 'footprint' that the CTP has in Scotland has been reduced in recent years;
- Government employment services are delivered Scotland-wide by expert employability providers. However research participants believe that these services do not fully understand the specific issues and needs that veterans' have, whilst the range of different programmes on offer can be particularly confusing for vulnerable veterans; and
- veterans' organisations are heavily involved in the delivery of employment support to service leavers through the CTP, and a number of organisations deliver specialist supported employment opportunities for ex-service personnel. However, few veterans' organisations deliver or coordinate programmes or activities that seek to address vulnerable veterans' complex and multiple needs with the intention of supporting them into mainstream employment.

Supported Employment

Supported employment for veterans is currently available through Lady Haig's Poppy Factory, Erskine, and the Lord Roberts Workshops.

It is generally agreed that the types of employment opportunities available through these organisations are useful and important. This service provision allows vulnerable ex-service personnel to work in an environment that takes account of their disability/vulnerability, enables them to work with colleagues with a shared or similar Forces background, and can ease a veteran's transition back into civilian life. For some veterans, supported employment can act as a stepping stone to mainstream work, but for others progressing to mainstream employment is unlikely to be feasible.

It is recognised and accepted that a variety of factors mean that changes will be required in how this provision is organised over the coming years. Factors influencing this include financial challenges facing existing services, the need for Scotland-wide provision, and the need to provide support and opportunities that are suitable and attractive for younger veterans as well as older veterans.

In addition, government policy is now increasingly focused on supporting disabled and vulnerable people into appropriate mainstream employment

opportunities. Consequently the way in which the government funds employment support and programmes for these client groups, and provides rights and benefits that these individuals can access is changing accordingly.

Veterans' organisations need to work quickly to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable veterans can be met. The concept of social enterprise and within that the social firm model, is one that may warrant further consideration.

Priorities for future action and recommendations

There are a number of areas where future action is needed and where we recommend activity can be undertaken:

Improving current MOD provision

Many of the difficulties and challenges facing veterans have resulted from their experiences in the Forces. In our survey 41% of respondents suffered an injury or illness that has since made it more difficult for them to get work, or has limited the type of work that they have been able to get. Respondents highlighted that since leaving the Forces, family or relationship problems, lack of relevant training or skills, and financial problems have made it difficult for them to find or keep a job.

Recommendation 1:

We recommend that Poppyscotland with Veterans Scotland might press for more careful and intense preparation and support by the MOD prior to personnel leaving the Forces. This could help reduce or prevent some of the difficulties faced by veterans when they are seeking employment.

Employment Counsellor support

The number of RFEA Employment Counsellors in Scotland has reduced at a time when the number of veterans coming forward with welfare support needs is increasing.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that Poppyscotland with Veterans Scotland press the MOD to provide appropriate levels of support throughout the country for veterans who need additional support to access employment. In the current economic situation, when unemployment is rising, this is particularly relevant

Piloting a new approach to improving access to employment for disabled and vulnerable veterans

Recommendation 3: We recommend that Poppyscotland considers establishing a new pilot project in an agreed local area to take a holistic

approach to addressing disabled and vulnerable veterans' barriers to employment, and to support these individuals towards positive outcomes. The project may be based on a similar model to that used through projects previously funded through the New Futures Fund in Scotland.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that if the proposed employment project were to be based in Edinburgh there should be a close working relationship with Veterans First Point – with for example Veterans First Point referring potential clients to the project, and the employment project using the specialist health services provided by First Point to address specific barriers to employment experienced by project participants.

Helping veterans to access government employment programmes

It is recognised that a single project will not be able to cater for the employment needs of all vulnerable veterans, and it is likely that not all veterans would wish to access such a project in any case. Furthermore, there are many government employment programmes and initiatives with a remit to provide services to all workless individuals, including disabled and vulnerable veterans, and it would be inefficient to duplicate these resources.

However at present mainstream employment services are not sufficiently geared up to address the needs of disabled and vulnerable veterans and some specialist provision is needed to bridge the gap until mainstream services can adequately respond.

Work is needed to help these organisations recognise when a veteran comes forward for services and understand the particular needs and experiences of veterans.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that Poppyscotland, in association with other veterans' organisations, lobbies the Department of Work and Pensions to begin collecting and reporting on data to indicate whether those claiming benefits and accessing government employment services have ever served in the Forces. It would also be useful to collect data on how long these veterans served for, and how long ago they left the Forces.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that a short training course is developed and is offered to Jobcentre Plus staff, to explain to them the specific needs, mindsets, and experiences of veterans, to enable Jobcentre Plus to provide a better, more tailored and more understanding service for disabled and vulnerable veterans. This course could also be offered to organisations in the public, private and voluntary sector providing employability support to disabled and vulnerable veterans.

Help for employers to understand the needs and merits of veterans

One of the key issues highlighted through the research was that employers often do not realise the attributes, skills and experiences that veterans can offer, and also many employers sometimes struggle to deal with the particular issues that employing vulnerable veterans might present. Further work in this area would therefore be beneficial.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that through Veterans Scotland, the ex-service organisations in Scotland draw up and agree a plan for how they can work together and market to employers the particular skills and attributes that veterans can bring to a business. It is envisaged that the RFEA and OA SCOTLAND would play a lead role in taking forward this recommendation. It is likely that a suitable starting point might be to develop a short presentation highlighting the benefits of employing veterans, and consider suitable audiences to whom this might be presented – for example Chambers of Commerce, local branches of the Federation of Small Businesses, CBI Scotland, Institute of Directors and Rotary clubs.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that funding is made available and work commissioned to develop a short training course for managers working in a range of employment sectors on best practice approaches to adopt when employing veterans with mental health difficulties which is a growing area of concern. Poppyscotland, other veterans' organisations and the specialist mental health organisation commissioned to develop the training should then work together to identify suitable employers to whom this training might be offered. delivered. The identification of employers could potentially be done in conjunction with the marketing activities undertaken to promote the benefits of employing veterans.

Making veterans aware of services

The research study showed that veterans are often not aware of the full range of different services that exist in "civvy street" that they need to deal with, or that they might be able to receive support from, in order to access employment or help them tackle barriers to work.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that consideration is given to developing a Scottish Veterans' Directory. This directory would provide information on all veterans' organisations in Scotland including their name, contact details, and a description of the services they offer. The directory should also, as a minimum, include details of local Jobcentre Plus offices across Scotland and basic descriptions of what programmes are available through Jobcentre Plus. Details of local housing offices in each area, and information about how to register on the housing list should also be included. It is important that the Directory provides information about local services so that veterans know what they can access in their own

area. Consideration should also be given as to what information can be included on other important local services – such as substance misuse projects, financial inclusion services, disability support groups, and organisations providing support with mental health issues.

Recommendation 10: We recommend that consideration is given to other formats that the Scottish Veterans' Directory could be made available in – for example through a dedicated website and/or telephone helpline. There may be potential for Poppyscotland or another relevant organisation to employ a member of staff with responsibility for providing a helpline service, managing a website, and distributing the Directory – including through veterans' organisations, the CTP, including the ESL pilot project, and the SPVA.

Recommendation 11: We recommend that the possibility of developing a 'buddying' network across Scotland is considered. The purpose of the network would be to provide new veterans with a 'buddy' in the form a veteran who has previously left the Forces and can provide information and advice about employment services and projects, and other key information that ex-service personnel need to know if they are to be in a position to enter the labour market. This can include information about how to get access to a house, where to get advice and information about debt, and so on. Options should be explored for how potential 'buddies' might be identified, and how new veterans should be made aware of the system and paired up with a 'buddy' in their local area. It may be that the individual employed to manage the Directory could also play a role in managing the 'buddy' network.

Volunteering opportunities for veterans

For some of the most vulnerable veterans entering mainstream employment is not a realistic goal. However volunteering can provide a positive outcome for these individuals and can help them feel as though they are making a positive contribution to society.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that all veterans' organisations in Scotland are asked to review the links and relationships that they have with voluntary sector organisations (such as the link that Poppyscotland has with Citizens' Advice Bureaux in Glasgow) and identify if there may be opportunities for vulnerable veterans to become volunteers in these organisations. This is a potentially 'win-win' situation, where voluntary sector organisations gain a new set of volunteers and vulnerable veterans achieve a positive employment outcome. There may be potential for these volunteering opportunities to be taken up by veterans participating in the proposed employment project, described above.

Supported employment

Recommendation 13: We recommend that veterans' organisations involved in the delivery of supported employment begin to have discussions with social enterprise support organisations to explore if this is a route or model that would be appropriate for them to move towards. Before opening up discussions with social enterprise support organisations it would be advisable for all veterans' organisations in Scotland which currently provide supported employment to come together to develop a shared strategy for the way forward for their community of interest. It may be that a working group could be set up under the aegis of Veterans' Scotland to take forward this issue.

Overall co-ordination and management

The findings and recommendations set out in this report require discussions, activity and action from a number of different organisations and groups. To ensure progress is made, and that different parties work together in a coherent and coordinated fashion, close monitoring and management will be required.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that Veterans' Scotland considers establishing an employment sub-group to take forward the actions and issues highlighted in this report. At minimum Veterans' Scotland should ensure that the issues and activity set out here are included as a specific agenda item at its regular Board meetings.

Developing Partnerships and Linkages

Recommendation 15: We recommend that Poppyscotland and Veterans' Scotland consider developing partnerships and linkages with other organisations which are involved in working with veterans. Amongst these might be RBLI in England which has successfully won government contracts for employment support, and the Scottish Prison Service, which is interested in cooperating with veterans organisations to ensure that it can optimise its support for ex-Forces prisoners, and can point them towards relevant employment organisations on release.