





Britain is at a fork in the road. This must now be a moment to think again about the country that we want to be.

We can either go back to the same insecure and unequal economy that's been so cruelly exposed by the virus. Or we can seize this moment, and go forward to a future that builds a more secure and prosperous economy.

This consultation, alongside the Policy Review led by our Party Chair Anneliese Dodds, presents us with an opportunity to set out a bold vision for a brighter future as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is a chance for us to address what matters most to people, and the eight consultation documents reflect this. From ensuring children are at the heart of our recovery from Covid-19, to making the green new deal work for all; from repairing the foundations of our economy, to ending violence against women and girls, this consultation is an opportunity for us to work out what it takes to make Britain the best place to grow up and grow old in.

Throughout the consultation there will be a number of online member events so that my colleagues in the Shadow Cabinet can directly hear your views on the eight consultation topics, and I encourage you to get involved. Whether you submit your views at an event or through Labour Policy Forum, whether as an individual or as part of a group, I look forward to hearing your insights. By connecting all parts of our Party in this discussion, together we can build a brighter future post-pandemic.

Keir Starmer
Leader of the Labour Party

Thank you for your involvement in the Labour Party's 2021 National Policy Forum (NPF) Consultation. Through this consultation we want to listen to our members, supporters and stakeholders on how the next Labour government can make the UK the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

This paper is one of eight policy documents published by the Labour Party as part of the consultation this year. Each document will look at the current situation in the UK and the policy challenges we face, followed by a set of questions on the way forward. There is no need to answer every one of these questions, nor is there a specific way in which to answer them. We suggest using the questions to stimulate your thoughts on what you think the main issues are in the document's policy area.

You can write your response as an individual, or as a collective through your local party or organisation. Once you have drafted your response, please submit it to us through Labour Policy Forum: www.policyforum.labour.org.uk. For more information on how to make a submission, see **www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/consultation-submission-guide**.

On the website you can also find out more ways to get involved with the consultation, including full information on our programme of member e-roundtable events. You can also read the seven other consultation documents which might be of interest to you as well. While we are primarily asking for policy ideas related to the eight consultation topics this year, if you have an idea or issue on another topic please do submit this on the website too.

We look forward to hearing your policy ideas on how we can make Britain the best place to grow up, grow old and live in.

Want to know more about how Labour makes its policy?

You can learn more about the Labour Party's policy making process on our Resource Hub **www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/resource-hub**.

You can also follow us on Twitter **[@labpolicyforum](https://twitter.com/labpolicyforum)** for all of the latest policy development news and events.

Accessible Materials

The Labour Party is an inclusive member-based organisation that prides itself on being accessible to all who share its values. If you would like an accessible version of these documents, please email us at **policydevelopment@labour.org.uk** to discuss how we can best accommodate your requirements.

A strategy for Veterans

Our Armed Forces are the finest in the world and so it is no wonder that many veterans also go on to be leaders in their civilian lives, in their work and communities. Every case of successful transition to civilian life should be celebrated and championed, learning from veterans themselves on how to raise the floor in the process. In partnership with military communities Labour can ensure even more veterans are set up for rich and fulfilling civilian lives.

Sadly, at present, this is not always the case and when some people leave the military, they are unable to receive the support and security they deserve. Labour must close that gap, ending the bad experiences, while making the good experiences better. With a coherent strategy, Labour can make Britain the best place for the Armed Forces and their families to grow up and grow old in.

In 2016, the Government estimated that there were approximately 2.5 million veterans residing in Great Britain or 5% of household residents aged over 16. Of this, it was estimated that half were aged 75 and over, projected to decrease to around 3% by 2028. The Royal British Legion estimate the wider ex-service community to be 6.2 million people in the UK.

However, while the overall number of veterans residing in Great Britain is set to decrease over the next ten years, veterans of working age is projected to increase from 37% in 2016 to 44% by 2028.

With more veterans transitioning into working civilian life by the end of the decade, a greater emphasis will be needed on successful transitions to civilian employment and support for long-term physical and mental health issues.

Labour began this process by establishing the Armed Forces Covenant, a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the Armed Forces, and their families, are treated fairly. However, more is needed.

In 2018, the Government introduced a Veteran's Strategy and in 2019, they introduced the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA). However, amid reported budget cuts to that office, and the office shutting down its veteran's helpline during the national lockdown last year, the effects of Covid have laid bare the shortcomings in service delivery for veterans.

The Armed Forces Bill, currently being debated in Parliament has made clear that more must be done to support forces personnel as they transition from service to civilian life including finding secure homes, seeking good employment and negotiating the welfare system.

The challenges

Transition to civilian life is important for ensuring security in work, housing and health both in the short and long term. According to service charity SSAFA 74% of the veterans they work with experienced problems in the first three years of transition, and 80% in the first five years, with 77% admitting they were not fully prepared for civilian life.

Not only are problems with transition bad for service leavers individually, but the estimated total cost of poor transition from the Armed Forces was projected to be £110 million a year in 2020. This is based on the costs to society of alcohol abuse, mental health disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, unemployment, family breakdown and other issues.

Employment, education and skills

The Government estimates that 79% of working age veterans are employed, though this estimate does not take into account the effects of Covid-19 on unemployment and the furlough scheme. Pre-Covid, 15,120 personnel left the services in the 12 months to 30 September 2019. This could mean as many as 3,000 veterans are unemployed in any given year, and the real figure could now be much higher.

Despite MOD funded employment support, for example the Career Transition Partnership, several studies conducted by Forces charities reveal that many veterans felt that the career planning assistance they received was ineffective.

The Royal British Legion reported in 2014 that over half of working veterans aged 16-34 say that they make little or no use of their skills and experience in their current job. Ranging from learning how to write a CV to making civilian career choices that work in the long term, the challenge is to establish a skills pathway for forces personnel that equips them with key life skills and provides a career trajectory that is longer than time in service.

A survey by the Army Families Federation (AFF) of unemployed British military spouses in Germany found that 86% cited a lack of qualifications as the reason why they could not find a job.

Personal Finances

Personnel finances were raised as a problem in the Selous Report, and a number of families expressed concerns about their finances when they no longer had the security of a military income.

The average net household income of SSAFA veterans was just under £17,000 per year in 2017 with 22% surviving on an annual net income of less than £7,500. This compared to the UK median disposable household income at the time of £28,300.

Unanticipated increases in the cost of living, compared to those in the military, can lead to families being financially worse off after transition. Higher outgoings can include mortgage repayments, council tax, water rates and the cost of commuting. According to a 2014 survey by the Royal British Legion of 16-34 year old veterans, one in four were in arrears and one in 20 had taken out a payday loan, equivalent to around 20,000 people.

Some veterans still leave service with little to no experience or knowledge of how to access pensions and benefits. The Royal British Legion reported in 2020 that 63% of those asked who applied for ESA and 76% of PIP Applicants found completing the form 'difficult' or 'very difficult'. This leaves them, already under tight financial pressure, with additional difficulties in accessing financial assistance to which they are entitled, and may be crucial if one or more of the family cannot work.

Health

Health remains one of the biggest challenges for many veterans in enjoying a secure and happy civilian life. Veterans can experience problems with the transfer of their medical records from the military to civilian systems, with GPs either unaware of military background or unable to appreciate fully their unique demands of long-term health conditions that occur in service.

Waiting times and accessing specialist services for long-term health issues are perennial problems, and veterans continue to face a postcode lottery when accessing services. A 2018 Defence Select Committee report said the wait for help was too long, and that the Armed Forces Covenant principle of priority treatment for service related health concerns is not being consistently applied across the UK.

A particular challenge is proving that an injury is connected to service, in order to qualify for the specialist care. For example, private compensation claims made by forces personnel against the MoD for injuries in the year 2019/20 revealed that 90% of claims were for noise induced hearing loss. While PTSD rates are relatively low, at 31 March 2020 some 3,739 awards had been made for PTSD under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) between 06 April 2005 and 31 March 2020.

Issues such as hearing loss and mental health can take years to develop, and understanding how welfare and healthcare systems work to prove connection to service is connected to the above problem of accessing compensation and welfare that many veterans lack.

Housing

Among the 18-29-year-old SSAFA veterans, 18% identified housing problems or being made homeless as a key life event most connected to the onset of their problems.

The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database contains information about rough sleepers in London. The CHAIN Annual Report 2019/20 recorded that 376 people (6% of those seen rough sleeping in 2019/20) had experience of serving in the Armed Forces. Currently, only London has the system of collecting homelessness data that identifies veterans, and Labour pledged in 2019 to extend this to whole country.

Beyond homelessness, nearly half of SSAFA veterans said they rent from their local authority or a housing association. Veterans do not have automatic priority when applying for social housing on a local authority's housing register. They can attract additional preference, but often in limited circumstances.

The inconsistency in housing provision across local government highlights continuing issues of the Armed Forces Covenant that is designed to prevent forces personnel and veterans being disadvantaged because of their service. At the end of March 2020, A Forces in Mind Trust analysis of 343 authorities' housing strategies showed that 252 did not include veterans and 176 had failed "to consider the needs of veterans in their homelessness strategies."

The way forward

Until recently one of the biggest challenges of implementing a successful veteran's strategy has been the lack of robust data on the precise number of veterans. As such, the inclusion of veterans as a category in this year's census, and the introduction of veteran ID cards are welcome, Labour alongside others pressed the Government hard for both.

With greater power of data, there can be a step change in support for veterans. However, there needs to be a more integrated approach between central government, agencies, the tri-services, local government and the third sector.

A key approach here could be creating universally recognised definitions of veterans, spouses and children, in respect of public service providers. With defined users, it would be easier for veterans and forces families to know what support they are entitled to, and in turn for service providers to be clear on their obligations. This process would be strengthened further by putting the Armed Forces Covenant fully into law.

Learning from civilian policy areas, there should be a greater focus on prevention of the common roadblocks to a successful transition, rather than just the cures for when things go wrong.

A number of proposals have already been put forward which focus on continuous support and preparing veterans for civilian life. For example, introducing life skills programmes for forces personnel, ranging from practical knowledge such as CV writing, financial management and accessing public services like GP registration or housing. This could be expanded to include programmes for spouses, or indeed career pathways that introduce personnel to possible long-term careers in civilian life.

The Ministry of Defence currently runs four schemes to promote lifelong learning in the Armed Forces, offering grants to help fund training courses and academic qualifications. More can undoubtedly be done to make sure more people take up the schemes.

Another proposal is providing more support for service leavers, with advice on the practicalities of civilian life, from help with employment and finances to housing support. Beyond the work of the Office for Veterans Affairs, the idea is for more active and personalised long-term support to be given to those veterans with complex needs during transition.

Similarly, for Armed Forces families a liaison officer provided whilst still in service could help with preparation for transition, dealing with issues in service such as housing, childcare, and more tailored training programmes and initiatives.

However, the onus should not just be on veterans but also on employers to understand what service leavers can offer. Employers need greater awareness about what military qualifications signify and how they relate to similar civilian qualifications. There also needs to be more appreciation of the skills developed in the military, from leadership to critical thinking.

Questions:

1. What responsibilities should the Armed Services [British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force] have prior to discharge and post-discharge for the long-term security of personnel?
2. What might a veteran's transition support scheme look like? How could non-military professionals be encouraged to provide their expertise, and in what areas? Are there successful schemes in other policy areas that provide a good blue print?
3. How could a skills pathway best provide long-term career opportunities for service personnel? What core skills should be covered from recruitment to transition? Should pathways be created that compliment civilian career options?
4. Would you support giving more priority pathways to veterans and their families seeking crucial public services during and after the point of transition? How can the Armed Forces Covenant be strengthened in law and practice?
5. Given the unique challenges facing Armed Forces families, how could more be done to support families in the services, and those going through transition on issues such as childcare, school places, and housing?