

Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers: Welfare conditionality and transitions from military to civilian life

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Overview

- Part 1: What do we know about Service leavers?
- Part 2: Addressing a gap in the knowledge:
Introducing the *Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers* project
- Part 3: Emerging insights ...

Current 'exemptions and easements'

As part of DWP commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant:

- Armed Forces Champions in each DWP District (double provision in some Districts)
- Armed Forces 'leads' within Job Centres
- Early access to the Work Programme
- Use of Service Medical Board evidence (rather than mainstream medical assessments) in claims for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Exemption from three month residence requirement
- Easing voluntary unemployment conditionality for spouses

A gap in the knowledge?

- Growing body of research recognising the issues that can occur in the transition from military life
 - Mental and physical health (Browne et al, 2007; Buckman et al, 2012; Carolan, 2016; Hynes and Thomas, 2016)
 - Homelessness (Gunner and Knott, 1997; Johnsen, Jones and Rugg, 2008)
 - Drug and alcohol use (Centre for Social Justice, 2014)
 - Financial hardship (Herritty, Hudson and Letts, 2011)
 - Interactions with the criminal justice system (Fossey et al, 2017)
- Existing specialist employment support (e.g. Career Transition Partnership, Armed Forces charities, etc.) enabling positive outcomes but very little known of people's experiences of mainstream unemployment support
- Review of literature suggests no research to date has explored the experiences of Service leavers within our mainstream conditional benefits system

Introducing the *Sanctions, Support and Service Leavers* project ...

Two year project (2017-2019) funded by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT) to provide a new qualitative evidence base on the impacts of welfare conditionality on Service leavers and their families

Objectives

- To map Service leavers' diverse pathways into, and out of, the mainstream social security benefits system;
- To assess the extent to which welfare conditionality within the benefit system may enhance or inhibit successful transitions to civilian life;
- To consider the effectiveness of the exemptions/easements made through the Armed Forces Covenant; and
- To explore wider debates about the ethicality of the application of a principle of welfare conditionality for Services leavers and their families, in light of the Armed Forces Covenant, and their previous service to the nation.

What are we doing?

Fieldwork with three sets of respondents

1. Semi-structured interviews with 10 policy stakeholders/national organisations
2. Semi-structured interviews with 20 frontline practitioners
3. Two waves of interviews with a sample of 60 Service leavers who are subject to conditionality (120 household interviews in total) – including consultation with individuals but also some family consultation

Fieldwork locations across England (Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and London)

Emerging issues

- Difficulties navigating the complex benefits system
- The *Work Programme* perceived as 'punishment' rather than employment support
- Lack of understanding of Job Centre/DWP staff re specific needs and circumstances of Service leavers
 - Concerns around safety of DWP staff and other work related activity participants in cases of severe mental health issues
 - Lack of awareness of type of employment Service leavers skills/qualifications would be suited to – but likewise, Service leavers sometimes experience difficulties in articulating transferability
- Variation in the quality (and visibility) of service provided by the Armed Forces Champions – some committed, some not
- Front line staff not always aware of the Armed Forces Covenant – however, non-disclosure of Service leaver status can also be an issue
- Service leavers who face difficulties with benefit claim often don't seek support until 'crisis point' (eg, sanction has been applied, wrongly classified)
- Questions raised around concept of 'transition' ...

Thank you

If you have any questions about the project please contact:

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