

FOCUS ON

Armed Forces Charities' Education & Employment Provision

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Executive summary

DSC is committed to illuminating the vital work of armed forces charities, and this report delivers an account of those providing education and/or employment support. To address this remit, DSC devised the following research questions:

- How many forces charities provide education and employment support?
- How is education/employment support delivered to beneficiaries?
- What standards of practice, collaboration and evaluation exist?

The UK armed forces community is estimated to include over six million individuals (Royal British Legion, 2014), with a further 15,000 individuals leaving the armed forces within the previous year (MOD, 2017). A key aspect of successful transition from military life is securing civilian employment. For some, this can present a significant challenge when marketing their skills to a potential employer or when trying to access education and enhance their prospects.

DSC's research found that at least 35,800 individuals accessed employment and/or education support within the previous year. The charities included within this report exist to provide Service-personnel and their families with support in accessing education and employment whilst serving, during the transition to civilian life, and throughout their civilian careers.

Effectively, this report holds a mirror to forces charities making provision for education and employment, providing a comprehensive overview of the sub-sector in which they operate. It is intended as a resource for all those involved with or interested in the armed forces charities sector, such as charity workers, policy makers, the media and the public.

KEY FINDINGS

How many forces charities provide education and employment support?

There are approximately 1,200 UK armed forces charities, relatively of which deliver education and/or employment support.

- 78 charities provide education support (6.5% of all armed forces charities).
- 59 charities provide employment support (5% of all armed forces charities).
- 41% of charities are termed 'Primary providers' i.e. education and/or employment was their sole charitable object.

How many Beneficiaries are supported?

The number of beneficiaries accessing education and employment services indicate substantial demand for provision, spread over a relatively small number of charities.

- 35,800 beneficiaries accessed education services within the past year.
- At least 3,308 beneficiaries were helped to gain qualifications.
- 28,100 individuals accessed employment services within the past year.
- At least 22,302 were supported into employment.
- Ex-service personnel were the most common type of beneficiary (86%).
- (65%) of charities made provision for dependents and 63% support spouse/partners.

How much expenditure is dedicated to education and employment?

The overall approximate annual expenditure on education and employment provision from all charities is approximately £25,600,000.

- Primary providers accounted for approximately £10,300,000 of this total.
- Secondary providers accounted for approximately £15,300,000.
- Over three-fifths (65%) of Primary charities are committing almost all their annual expenditure to education and employment.

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- Almost half (48%) of Secondary providers are spending one-quarter of their annual expenditure to education and employment.

Which types of services are provided?

Armed forces charities offered a wide range of education and employment services, many of which supported mainstream qualifications.

- Two-fifths (44%) of charities provide vocational learning support.
- One-third (35%) of charities provide transitional support.
- Grants to individuals were provided by two-fifths of charities (42%).
- 65% of charities provide signposting to employment services.
- Higher education (30%) and vocational awards (18%) were the most common type of qualification supported by charities.

To what extent do charities engage in collaboration and partnership?

DSC found extensive evidence of cross-sector collaboration, almost three fifths (66%) of charities reporting experiencing some benefits of collaboration.

- Partnership between charities themselves was most common (59%).
- Over one-third (36%) of charities partnered with business.
- 13% of charities specified not engagement in collaboration or experience of barriers to forming partnerships.
- Less than one-quarter (21%) of charities partnered with statutory organisations or adopted government employment initiatives.

What standards of accreditation and evaluation exist?

Accreditation was rare, 70% of charities reported training programmes were not accredited and 68.4% said staff members were not accredited.

- Half (51%) of charities provided data on employability outcomes.
- One-quarter (26%) of charities provided data on qualification success rates.
- High success rates for qualifications and employment were common (where recorded).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- DSC's findings largely debunk the myth that there are too many forces charities, of the 1,200 armed forces charities registered in the UK, only 5% make provision for employment and 6.5% make provision for education.
- Forces charities provide an extensive variety of education and employment services, many of which support a broad range of mainstream qualifications. The most common types of qualifications supported tended to be higher level career-orientated qualifications such as degrees and diplomas vocational wards.
- Charities collaborate extensively with other organisations in order to deliver education and employment support. However a small number of charities found it difficult to form effective partnerships and engagement with statutory schemes was low, collaboration should be widely encouraged across the sector to avoid duplication and share resources and expertise.
- Accreditation was rare, DSC recommends that charities implement recognisable forms of accreditation, which would help to direct beneficiaries to appropriate services. DSC recognises accreditation is not relevant to all charities; however, it is particularly important for 'education and training providers'.
- Few charities were able to provide data on employability and qualification outcomes, DSC recommends that all charities show commitment to monitoring service outcomes and conducting impact reports.