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Positive Futures for Military Partners

A report prepared for the three Families Federations

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Executive Summary

The Positive Futures for Military Partners review was commissioned by the three Families Federations collaboratively in April 2023, with funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) under its 'Supporting Partners' programme. The purpose was to undertake an independent review of current employment support available to spouses and partners (including that provided by the Forces Families Jobs website) and consider how the offer could be communicated in a collaborative and coherent way to best meet the needs of beneficiaries. In addition, the review was to scope the next stage for the FFJ site and make recommendations for its future and sustainability.

The Methodology

The review consisted of three phases: the planning phase, the engagement phase (with stakeholder interviews, service users survey, and an evidence and desktop review) and the analysis and reporting phase. Full details of the methodology are in Section 2 and Annex A.

The Cohort and the Barriers to Employment

Approximately 57,000 Regular trained Service personnel are married or in a civil partnership. There will also be many spouses and partners of Reservists, making the spousal and partners cohort one of significant size. In addition, there is huge diversity and variety in the cohort such as age, qualifications, employment aspirations, nationality, among many other variables. FAMCAS 2023 reports that 38% of spouses look for a job each year. This shows that thousands of people with a vast array of employment aspirations may need employment support each year.

The potential barriers faced by spouses and partners of people serving in the UK Armed Forces are well documented and include factors such as frequent mobility, difficulties in accessing childcare, and the locations of some military bases. These factors were also cited by survey respondents where the biggest three barriers to seeking secure employment were lack of childcare provision (46%), the Service person being unable to regularly support childcare needs (44%), and frequent moves (41%).

The Environment

The growing body of evidence has contributed to more effort being made to support the employment aspirations of spouses and partners, including the establishment of FFJ.

This increased focus includes a dedicated workstream (7: Supporting Partners) in the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy, the Armed Forces Families Action Plan, the Partner Employment Working Group and the Cobseo Sub Cluster. Further enabling the delivery of the Strategy is the funding awarded through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) Supporting Partners Programme.

With all the increased focus on spousal employment, the direct support in this area seems to be delivered almost entirely by non-statutory organisations. Although noting that changes to childcare policy, including increased eligibility, will hopefully have a positive effect on removing some of the barriers to employment spouses and partners face. Some stakeholders felt that not enough is yet being done in this area. However, the Families Strategy is only one year into a 10-year life and addressing the barriers to spousal employment has been the initial priority.

There are a number of organisations offering employment support for spouses and partners either exclusively or as part of an offering to a broader Armed Forces Community cohort. Representatives for many of these organisations were interviewed as part of this review and whilst many did not foresee significant changes in the future in their offering around spousal employment support, there

were some smaller changes anticipated. Employer and trainer stakeholder observations included noticing an increasing number of organisations operating in this area of employment support and also some positive examples of collaboration between their organisations to offer support.

Duplication and gaps

Many stakeholders felt the area of spousal employment support was crowded, confusing for everyone, and needed to be streamlined, although others did not feel there was much duplication or even felt that there was not yet enough provision to meet all existing need.

Possible duplication was thought to have both positive and negative connotations. From a negative perspective stakeholders thought the landscape was confusing for spouses and partners, employers and MOD, making it unclear which organisation offered which type of support. However, more positively, others felt that more than one provider offering similar types of support gave choice to beneficiaries. It was noted that duplication seemed to be more evident in some areas of employment support than others, and duplication was also identified not only within the sector, but outside in general society.

Even with many stakeholders feeling the sector to be crowded, there were, nonetheless, several gaps identified in the area of employment support for spouses – mostly identified by a single stakeholder.

Covid and the Cost-of-living situation

A couple of specific environmental factors were explored during stakeholder interviews and in the service user survey: the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living situation.

From an employment perspective, stakeholders generally felt the Covid pandemic would have a beneficial legacy for spouses and partners as some of the barriers to employment could be broken down by some of the workplace changes arising from the pandemic e.g. more flexible working policies, and the greater range of roles available for homeworking. Most of the survey respondents said that the Covid pandemic had not changed their employment aspirations, but of those that reported a change to their employment aspirations, this generally related to a desire to work remotely or in a hybrid role.

Stakeholders believed that the current cost-of-living situation means there is now a greater need for a second income in the household, and this was reinforced by the survey responses where this subject generated the greatest number of responses. Almost three quarters of survey respondents said the cost-of-living situation had affected them and many gave examples of the financial pressures.

Sub cohorts

Two sub cohorts were identified where it was felt additional or bespoke employment support might be required: non-UK spouses and partners, and bereaved spouses which were explored during stakeholder interviews. Some stakeholders felt non-UK spouses and partners might have more immediate priorities than employment, such as securing the correct visa, finance and housing. There were considered to be additional challenges such as not having UK-recognised qualifications and many not being able to drive (felt to be essential in some locations). Stakeholders felt that while employment needs may change following a bereavement, bereaved spouses would be hard to reach to offer employment support and certainly the timing and messaging would need to be sensitive and appropriate.

In addition to these two sub cohorts, others were highlighted by stakeholders where they felt additional or bespoke support might be needed which may or may not be currently met, although more research would be necessary to determine whether there are unique challenges for these cohorts and whether these needs are being met.

Perceptions of the FFJ model

Stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about the level of collaboration between the three Families Federations on FFJ and the tri-service nature of FFJ. They also felt the ethos, values and motivations of the three organisations (i.e. not for profit) made them ideally placed to host and deliver FFJ. Stakeholders believed FFJ to be a good concept and sound model, doing a great job with very limited resources. The Federations are impartial and act only in the best interests of spouses – so they can act as an ‘honest broker’. The impressive reach of FFJ with employers was also referred to positively several times.

Employers and trainers greatly appreciated the opportunity and access to this platform, enabling them to reach a large pool of high calibre people, and at the same time being able to publicly demonstrate their commitment and support for members of the Armed Forces Community. Most survey respondents felt that FFJ offered them relevant employment support to varying degrees. This percentage reduced slightly when asked whether service users would use FFJ in the future when looking for employment or training support.

From a very positive endorsement of the organisations and the FFJ model, there was quite a lot of commonality in terms of what works well, and also many areas identified for what could be improved, with very strong views on the way forward.

In terms of hosting the FFJ website, the only possible alternative suggested was for it to become a MOD outsource such as with CTP. However, this would significantly change every aspect of FFJ and may not be something MOD would be willing to consider. So the conclusion reached is that the FFJ website should remain within AFF/ broader Families Federation management.

Website appearance and functionality

Stakeholders were mixed in their views on the website appearance and functionality. The positives included finding the site clear and accessible, with lots of content accessible without needing to register. ERS (Gold) employers also appreciated the prominent status given to their organisation on the website.

One unique feature of FFJ is the jobs board function, which contains an extensive number and range of vacancies that can be viewed without registering. Most survey respondents had looked for job vacancies on the FFJ site and some had uploaded their CV to the FFJ website.

FFJ offers a range of other employment support services on additional webpages, primarily through signposting to other organisations/websites offering these services rather than delivering directly. While these pages were visited far less frequently than the jobs board it is not possible to determine whether this was because the level of need is low, or because service users are not aware of these services, or another reason entirely.

What works well with the website?

Stakeholders had some very positive comments about the job vacancies advertised. With such a broad ranging cohort in terms of employment aspirations, qualifications, locations, it was felt there

was something for everyone. FFJ's reach, strong connection, and good relationships with employers had attracted big employers to FFJ and the multi-poster functionality was considered a huge benefit.

What could be improved with the website?

On the website overall, stakeholders, service users, and employers suggested a number of key areas for improvement, including better use of data/analytics, better communication, more personalisation of employer profiles, and overall improvements to the FFJ website.

The Future

While stakeholders strongly supported the continuance of FFJ – and as a Families Federation resource - there was also a strong response to where FFJ could do more, and how it should operate in the future. Equally, there were positive responses from service users but, again, with suggestions for the future. Continuing in its current form was not really considered desirable or sustainable in the future by stakeholders as FFJ would become diminished by other organisations innovating and growing more strongly in the sector.

Service users are at the heart of FFJ, and the most important thing is to provide the best possible employment support to beneficiaries in a sustainable way. Based on the findings of this review, this would require two courses of action. The first is to improve and enhance the employment support offer of FFJ in the areas identified in this review. The second course of action is to ensure the strength and profile of FFJ in a growing and maturing spousal employment support sector, continuing to be respected and credible as others around are growing, and to avoid the risk of reducing traction with spouses and partners. To achieve both courses of action, and develop an effective and sustainable FFJ into the future, there are a number of options to consider around two different operating models:

1. Enhancement of FFJ's current model and offer

FFJ could remain in its current model and as a resource of the Families Federations. However, in addition to the current annual cost of approximately £51,100, additional resources would be required to make the necessary changes to the website, services and offer. There are a number of ways these core costs and additional resources could be secured:

- a. Funding from MOD/AFCFT/other funders.
- b. Develop a 'Partners' programme with funding for an enhanced offer.
- c. Seeking funding from the RN, Army or RAF for specific posts.

2. Partnership model

A second way to offer a broader package of employment support to spouses is through partnership with another organisation with a similar model, ethos and values. In this case the suggestion is with the Forces Employment Charity (FEC). The FEC runs a Families Programme with an impressive reach on the ground and is about to expand further to meet increasing need. With complementary offers, a more holistic package of employment support could be offered to spouses and partners. In addition, with the combined influence, credibility and reach of the organisations involved, the result could provide overall strategic leadership and direction in this sector which may help make the landscape clearer for everyone over time.

Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Spouses and partners of those serving in the UK Armed Forces can face a number of unique challenges and barriers in their search to secure and maintain their desired form of employment (see Section 3). The Army Families Federation (AFF), the Naval Families Federation (NFF) and the Royal Air Force Families Federation (RAF FF) – collectively ‘the three families federation’ – deliver dedicated employment support individually and collaboratively for their spouses and partners. This includes operating and supporting the Forces Families Jobs website, noting that overall responsibility for the Forces Families Jobs website sits with the Army Families Federation¹. The Positive Futures for Military Partners review was commissioned by the three Families Federations collaboratively in April 2023, with funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) under its ‘Supporting Partners’ programme. The purpose was to undertake an independent review of current employment support available to spouses and partners (including that provided by the Forces Families Jobs website) and consider how the offer could be communicated in a collaborative and coherent way to best meet the needs of beneficiaries. In addition, the review was to scope the next stage for the FFJ site and make recommendations for its future and sustainability.

1.2 The scope of the review was clarified as follows:

- i. To include England, Scotland and Wales, but to exclude Northern Ireland (given the unique and complex context) and employment overseas. Employment overseas is the subject of great focus at the moment and is being considered separately.
- ii. ‘Employment support’ is potentially a very broad area and so a definition was agreed to provide boundaries for this review. This meant that subjects such as childcare provision was excluded from the scope as it is also currently being considered by the three Families Federations elsewhere. The agreed definition for employment support – and therefore the extent of this review is:

Employment support can be defined as those services directly related to securing and sustaining desired employment by military partners and spouses. This includes advertising job vacancies, training opportunities (such as CV writing and upskilling), employment related events, and information for employers.

1.3 This report makes recommendations on FFJ based on the findings of this review, and possible next steps for the three Families Federations to consider.

¹ Due to Forces Families Jobs data security the NFF and RAFFF currently have no way of accessing any data from FFJ. The AFF holds all information and plans.

Section 2 - Methodology Overview

2.1 The review consisted of three phases: the planning phase, the engagement phase and the analysis and reporting phase. Full details of the methodology are in Annex A, and an overview is below.

2.2 Phase 1. The initial planning or scoping phase started with validating the four research questions as follows:

1. To identify any employment support aimed specifically at military spouses and partners beyond that provided by FFJ.
2. To identify any potential duplication to the employment support offered by FFJ.
3. To identify any gaps in the provision of employment support by FFJ that could potentially be addressed in the future.
4. To consider the next stage for the Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) site to make it sustainable and as effective and collaborative as possible in the employment support offered. This would include future hosting options, additional support services, and communications options.

2.3 In seeking to answer the questions above, the next stage involved mapping the stakeholder landscape, identifying key stakeholders to interview, and drawing up the interview guide. It also included designing the service user survey to include the essential views of beneficiaries. Finally, it also included identifying relevant evidence to help inform the next phase of work. This phase was completed on 1st August 2023 and the output from this phase was used as the basis of phase 2.

2.4 Phase 2 – the engagement phase. Phase 2 consisted of several strands of activity:

- A desk-top review of other organisations providing support or services in this area to understand the wider landscape of support and to inform the interview guide. A list of these organisations and the key areas they cover is at Annex B.
- Stakeholder Interviews. Interviews were conducted with a range of external and internal stakeholders to obtain and synthesize views on the spousal and partner employment support landscape and Forces Families Jobs (FFJ). External stakeholders included employers, trainers, the Ministry of Defence, the Single Services and organisations delivering employment services or support to the spouses and partners of those serving in the Armed Forces (charities and other organisational entities). A generic version of the discussion guide (which was tailored accordingly) is at Annex C, and a full list of external stakeholders is at Annex D. Internal stakeholders included the employment specialists within the three Families Federations and FFJ.
- Service User input. This was sought through a comprehensive survey. The survey was circulated through the three Families Federations using their respective branding in order to attract as many responses as possible.
- Evidence Review. A review of recent reports (from 2018) and documents relating to spousal employment was conducted to support the research questions above. A full list of documents considered is at Annex E.

2.5 Phase 3 – the analysis and reporting phase.

Phase 3 started in November 2023 when all the phase 2 activities were complete. This report is the output from phase 3 which involved analysing all the outputs from phase 2 and producing a report with evidence-based recommendations for the future activities of FFJ.

Section 3 – Context

The Cohort

3.1 Approximately 57,000 Regular trained Service personnel are married or in a civil partnership². There will also be many spouses and partners of Reservists, making the spousal and partners cohort one of significant size. In addition, there is huge diversity and variety in the cohort such as age, qualifications, employment aspirations, nationality, among many other variables. FAMCAS 2023³ reports that 38% of spouses look for a job each year – a rate that has remained fairly consistent over the last few years. This shows that thousands of people with a vast array of employment aspirations may need employment support each year.

3.2 Although they maybe a spouse or partner of someone in the Royal Navy (RN), the Army, or the Royal Air Force (RAF), the employment issues identified during this review seemed to relate more to spousal characteristic (e.g. being a dispersed spouse or facing challenges around childcare) than their spouse or partner's Service. There could, however, be implications by Service for delivery of employment support i.e. the RN has greatest proportion of dispersed spouses, and there is not reported to be as much demand for employment support. On the other hand, groups of Army personnel can move on mass presenting an opportunity for employment support to be delivered to groups of spouses and partners.

The Barriers and Challenges faced by Spouses and Partners

3.3 The potential barriers faced by spouses and partners of people serving in the UK Armed Forces are well documented in recent literature (Lyonette C. et al.,⁴ Selous A. et al., 2020⁵). These reports describe the effects on a spouse or partner's career from factors such as frequent mobility, difficulties in accessing childcare, and the locations of some military bases. These factors were also cited by survey respondents where the biggest three barriers to seeking secure employment were lack of childcare provision (46%⁶), the Service person being unable to regularly support childcare needs (44%), and frequent moves (41%) (table 1 below). Finally, these barriers or difficulties are also evident in the results of the FAMCAS surveys over the last few years.

² Based on data from the Joint Personnel Administration system (JPA) as at 1 March 2023.

³ [UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2023 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/115444/UK_Tri-Service_Families_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_Results_2023.pdf)

⁴ Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and Support Required. [Employment-Research-report-ONLINE-COPY.pdf](https://www.warwick.ac.uk/facultyofbusiness/research/employment-research/reports/employment-research-report-online-copy.pdf) Warwick Institute for Employment Research, August 2018.

⁵ Living In Our Shoes: Understanding the Needs of UK Armed Forces Families [Living in our shoes full report](https://www.mod.uk/media/115444/Living_in_our_shoes_full_report.pdf) Report of a Review commissioned by MOD in Jun 2020.

⁶ Percentage figures from survey responses are rounded to the nearest whole number throughout this report.

Table 1. The barriers faced by spouses and partners in securing employment (survey respondents selected their top three barriers from the list offered).

1	Childcare provision	46%
2	Service person unable to regularly support with childcare needs	44%
3	Frequent moves	41%
4	Patchy CV and career history	27%
5	Current location	22%
6	Frequency of deployment of Service person	15%
7	Other (please specify) – see list below	13%
8	Ability to gain/maintain qualifications	12%
9	Discrimination from an employer due to being an Armed Forces family	11%
10	Ability to transfer qualifications	9%
11	Transport links	8%
12	Duration of deployments	6%
13	Poor internet connectivity	4%

For the 13% who stated 'Other', the barriers were given as follows (responses pasted as written):

- Lack of support for working from home.
- knowing what career to do.
- Late notice to move which doesn't work with teaching profession.
- Lack of work-from-home jobs that would allow me to stay in a career for more than 2 years.
- Cost of childcare (no access to funds due to being American on visa) and not really knowing where to start in my search.
- no references, no work experience as finished university right before COVID, no support with childcare from family.
- Not allowed work visa.
- New to the country.
- With having to move my confidence is rubbish.
- I'm in full time education.
- FAM model not taking into account need for separate working space.
- lack of remote working jobs.
- School aged children to support – need flexibility.
- Confidence in progression and opportunities that are available to me.
- Army telling you your job is not important the army comes first.
- Chronic health condition.
- Time of moves don't colorate with having to give notice as a teacher.
- Most of available work is not in sector I'm trained in.
- Confidence.

3.4 Taken at face value the FAMCAS reports over the last few years seem to suggest that the rate of spousal employment is consistent with/higher than the national average, leading some to suggest that there is not an issue with spousal employment. This reported level of employment has also remained fairly stable. However, it is important to note some key shortcomings of the FAMCAS survey about spousal employment⁷:

⁷ Discussions are ongoing to see how FAMCAS questions could be improved to provide a more helpful and inclusive picture.

- The survey is completed only by spouses and does not include partners.
- The age range for the national statistic is aged 16-64 which is not necessarily a reasonable comparison with the spouses and partners of the serving population.
- The statistics do not reflect job satisfaction and potential underemployment (identified as an evidence gap by several stakeholders).

3.5 Even with these shortcomings, there are a couple of other interesting points to note in the FAMCAS employment sections:

- Employment rates are lower for those living outside the UK. Whilst out of scope for this review, it is understood that a great deal of focus is currently being given to this area, including through the Families Strategy Action Plan and the Cobseo Sub Cluster activities.
- There is a fairly high percentage of dual serving couples, which offers an opportunity around spousal employment support discussed in Section 4 relating to collaboration with CTP when the person leaving the Armed Forces may also be a spouse or partner of someone remaining in the Armed Forces.

3.6 These barriers have been highlighted consistently in the last few Armed Forces Covenant Annual Reports by the Families Federations among others.

The wider environment

3.7 The growing body of evidence (above and in Annex E) has contributed to more effort being made to support the employment aspirations of spouses and partners. This includes the establishment of FFJ to address a need identified in the report by Lyonette et al., 2018⁸.

3.8 Stakeholders welcomed the increased focus on the spousal and partner employment support area than had been the case a few years ago. Some stakeholders reflected that sometimes this focus may be about retaining the Service person, while others primarily consider spouses. It was noted that the Haythornthwaite⁹ review makes little reference to employment support for spouses which seemed surprising in this context.

3.9 This increased focus includes a dedicated workstream (7: Supporting Partners) in the UK Armed Forces Families Strategy¹⁰, the Armed Forces Families Action Plan¹¹, the Partner Employment Working Group and the Cobseo Sub Cluster.

3.10 The UK Armed Forces Families Strategy was published in 2022 as a 10-year strategy (ibid) and workstream 7 – Supporting Partners – covers spousal and partner employment support. This Strategy is based on the recommendations made in the *Living In Our Shoes*¹² report which was published just before the Strategy. The MOD Armed Forces Families Steering Group (AFFSG) owns this Strategy and Action Plan, while the Head of MOD's Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding Team chairs this Steering Group, reporting to the Chief of Defence People. An accompanying Action

⁸ Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and Support Required. [Employment-Research-report-ONLINE-COPY.pdf](#) Warwick Institute for Employment Research, August 2018.

⁹ Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation [Agency and agility: Incentivising people in a new era](#) Haythornthwaite, Jun 2023.

¹⁰ [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32](#)

¹¹ [AF Families Plan 2022](#)

¹² Living In Our Shoes: Understanding the Needs of UK Armed Forces Families [Living in our shoes full report](#) Report of a Review commissioned by MOD in Jun 2020.

Plan was also published in 2022 setting out six activities (and aligning these with the Living In Our Shoes recommendations) relating to workstream 7. And in 2023 a document was published which described the progress made after a year¹³. Main activities reported around workstream 7 relate to the launch of the Wraparound Childcare (WAC) scheme, the Celebrating Forces Families Awards, and the launch of an Armed Forces Families Fund (AF3) to support the partners of Service personnel. Spousal employment overseas has also been an area of focus. These were identified in the Strategy as the most urgent areas to address.

3.11 Further enabling the delivery of the Strategy is the funding awarded through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) Supporting Partners Programme. In February 2023, 12 grants totalling £483,144 were awarded under this programme across the UK for a range of projects supporting spousal and partner employment. This FFJ review is one of those 12 projects. There was speculation among stakeholders that the range and type of projects funded may exacerbate some of the issues around duplication covered below, whereas others felt it was encouraging innovation and to be expected in a new and maturing workstream. A further round of AFCFT funding on this topic has recently been announced.

3.12 The Partner Employment Working Group (PEWG) is a group of 15 organisations (including the three Families Federations) established initially by the MOD, and now chaired by Sarah Walker. A PEWG Community Interest Company has also been created to provide the necessary organisational structure for handling money e.g. the financial transactions of the Celebrating Forces Families Awards. This group is reportedly designed to support the MOD and to ensure collaboration which is not considered easy as each member organisation has its own agenda and priorities. Some stakeholders expressed frustration at what they perceived to be more talk than action in the PEWG. No documentation on the PEWG was made available to this review e.g. Terms of Reference, and so it is not possible to confirm the purpose or role of this group. It is understood that the Group's current priority is employment support for those living overseas.

3.13 The Cobseo Families, Spouses and Partners Sub Cluster. This Sub Cluster has been established from the Cobseo Employment Cluster, with a specific remit of considering spouses and partners. The Sub Cluster reviewed its priorities in April 2023 (document seen as part of this review) with these priorities being closely aligned with seeking to address known barriers, and also the priorities under Workstream 7 of the Families Strategy relating to overseas employment. This Sub Cluster is chaired by the Forces Employment Charity.

3.14 With all the increased focus on spousal employment as described here, the direct support in this area seems to be delivered almost entirely by non-statutory organisations as described in the next section. Although noting that changes to childcare policy, including increased eligibility, will hopefully have a positive effect on removing some of the barriers to employment spouses and partners face. Some stakeholders felt that not enough is yet being done in this area. There were some issues identified during the MOD Spousal Employment Trial¹⁴ around the tax implications for the service person, which may be one factor hindering progress here. However, the Families Strategy is only one year into a 10-year life and addressing the barriers (as endorsed in the survey for this review) to spousal employment has been the initial priority.

¹³ [Armed Forces Families Strategy one year on](#)

¹⁴ Evaluation of the Ministry of Defence Spouse Employment Support trial. [evaluation-ministry-of-defence-spouse-employment-trial.pdf](#) FiMT, Jun 2018.

3.15 Additional Sources of Evidence. This review sought to identify any additional sources of evidence on this subject of spousal and partner employment that had not been identified previously. The review found that most employer organisations referred to their own internal reporting systems for considering things like how many people are recruited through advertising on FFJ. There was also a suggestion to look to initiatives in the USA to see where more could be learnt e.g. the Hire Heroes programme¹⁵. Defence Relationship Management (DRM) conduct an annual Employer Attitude Survey. Although this is predominantly about employer attitudes to reservist employment, there are some questions about spousal employment and the results may be useful.

Recommendation 1:

Ask DRM whether they would be willing and able to share the results from their annual Employer Survey relating to spousal employment.

The Microenvironment/spousal employment sector

3.16 There are a number of organisations (of differing legal constitution) offering employment support for spouses and partners either exclusively or as part of an offering to a broader Armed Forces Community cohort. There was felt to be some confusion as to whether spouses were really included or not in some of this provision as they are sometimes grouped in with the wider 'Armed Forces Community' e.g. 'X-Forces Enterprise' offers support to spouses, but their organisation name might lead spouses to think it is just for veterans. A list of these organisations is at Annex B. This review has concentrated on those operating in this sector, rather than broadening out to consider all the generic employment support offered to spouses as part of the general population.

3.17 Representatives for many of the organisations listed in Annex B were interviewed as part of this review. Whilst many did not report or disclose any significant future change in their offering around spousal employment support, but there were a few examples listed here which may cause some change in the microenvironment:

- i. From January 2024 the Forces Employment Charity (FEC) will expand its face-to-face (F2F) offer to families with staff at Plymouth, Aldershot, South Oxfordshire, Catterick and Glasgow. This is in response to growing demand for support.
- ii. X-Forces Enterprise is considering how to offer more mentoring support to those running their own business beyond the initial start-up phase.
- iii. Milspo services have been free so far, but this is no longer sustainable. The organisation is therefore moving to a two-tier system offering a free service and a paid service.
- iv. Recruit for Spouses is planning to offer more support for the non-UK cohort in 2024.
- v. Military Co-Working Network (MCN) are hoping to open a couple more hubs soon.
- vi. RBLI Lifeworks are developing resources digitally so that support can be offered even if not through F2F courses.
- vii. Some employers/trainers talked about potentially offering more spousal programmes.
- viii. There was a non-attributable comment that Supporting the Unsung Hero is looking for a new partner, and X-Forces Enterprise may take on this role.

¹⁵ [Home - Hire Heroes USA](#)

It was also noted that the imminent Career Transition Partnership (CTP) relet does not include provision for spousal employment support. It was not possible to establish the reason for this.

Employer and trainer stakeholder perceptions of this microenvironment.

3.18 Employer and trainer stakeholders commented on their perceptions of this environment, and their observations included:

- There are an increasing number of organisations operating in this area of employment support and this had various effects. Firstly, some stakeholders are choosing to remain fairly strategic in their support rather than working with an increasing number of organisations i.e. continuing to work the FFJ, FEC, CTP etc. Secondly, stakeholders see an increasing number of requests for funding. Thirdly, the more organisations there are, the more opportunities to spread the word and promote what is offered which is welcomed (NHS Step Into Health).
- Stakeholder Collaboration. Some employer/trainer stakeholders referred positively to examples of collaboration between their organisations to offer support e.g. between Barclays and Amazon in Scotland.
- Stakeholders questioned whether there might be too much focus on online provision (and apps) and not enough being offered F2F.
- There may not be as many partnerships in this sector compared to other sectors e.g. in the disability sector Compass is working with 20 charity partners.

Duplication and gaps

3.19 On the subject of possible duplication and gaps in this area of employment support, there were a range of responses. Many stakeholders felt the area of spousal employment support was crowded, confusing for everyone, and needed to be streamlined. Others did not feel there was much duplication or even felt that there was not yet enough provision to meet all existing need.

Duplication

3.20 Possible duplication was thought to have positive and negative connotations. From a negative perspective stakeholders thought the landscape was confusing for spouses and partners, employers, MOD, making it unclear which organisation offered which type of support. However, more positively, others felt that more than one provider offering similar types of support gave choice to beneficiaries in terms of location, timings, online or F2F etc. It was noted that duplication seemed to be more evident in some areas of employment support (e.g. help with CV writing) than others (e.g. business start-up).

3.21 There were also observations that the quality of support was variable, and that as organisations grow and expand (possibly in response to pursuing funding opportunities) they are offering increasingly overlapping services.

3.22 Duplication was also identified not only within the sector, but outside in general society. For example in the area of starting a business X-Forces Enterprise and Supporting the Unsung Hero offer support to the Armed Forces Community/spouses specifically. In general society organisations like Barclays and others also offer help to people wanting to set up their own business. There is variety in the eligibility for support as the sector providers will support any member of the Armed Forces

Community whereas an organisation like Barclays would seem most keen to support people looking to develop large businesses rather than sole traders. So in this context duplication of provision was felt to be positive from a beneficiary perspective.

Gaps

3.23 Even with many stakeholders feeling the sector to be crowded, there were, nonetheless, several gaps identified in the area of employment support for spouses – mostly identified by a single stakeholder (those marked * are covered again later in the report).

- Support to dispersed families*. More bespoke support may be available on bases to those living on or nearby e.g. training opportunities and sometimes the option to access an MCN hub. Dispersed spouses cannot take advantage of this provision. This gap was felt to be most applicable to Royal Navy families with a higher proportion of dispersed families.
- A holistic package of support*. Several stakeholders felt that while many organisations offered support on individual aspects of seeking and securing employment, there is a gap in holistic support that brings everything together in a person-centred approach.
- Business startups and subsequent development. While there is felt to be good provision for those considering starting their own business, there is less support once the business is established e.g. mentoring for growth etc. It was felt more could be provided in this area.
- Volume. One stakeholder felt that volume was the gap i.e. not yet enough provision to meet current levels of need.
- Non-UK spouses*. Non-UK spouses were felt to face specific challenges that required a bespoke approach – which may not be met currently.
- Access to opportunities in education and associated funding. Training and education opportunities can contribute to securing desired employment, and there was felt to be a gap in education opportunities i.e. higher education and courses and associated funding.
- Communications*. Overall many stakeholders felt that communication of the types of employment support offered, and where/how to access it was a gap.
- Tangible support for those who have been out of the workplace for a longer period of time e.g. taking an employment break to have children.

Recommendation 2:

To note the possible gaps in employment support identified by stakeholders and consider whether there may be unmet need which needs to be addressed (noting that some of these areas are also explored more fully later in the report).

3.24 Priority for the Sector. When asked about what the priority should be in this sector, where stakeholders offered views, these were felt to be greater clarity / messaging on the offer to service users, and greater collaboration in the sector around service delivery. These issues are addressed in Section 4.

3.25 Overall the perception of duplication and gaps in employment support was varied. This possibly reflected the ‘part of the elephant’ the stakeholder was seeing. It may also demonstrate that this sector of support is much newer and less developed than other more established areas of support

e.g. employment support for veterans. So perhaps it is early days and as the plethora of new or expanding organisations becomes established and various funding streams impact delivery, things will become clearer. It was hoped that things would 'shake down' over time, possibly with the emergence of a sector leader to draw support together (this point is considered in Section 5).

Covid and the Cost-of-living situation

3.26 During phase 1 of this review, a couple of specific environmental factors were discussed which could impact the employment landscape: the Covid pandemic, and the cost-of-living situation. These areas were explored during stakeholder interviews and in the service user survey.

The Covid Pandemic

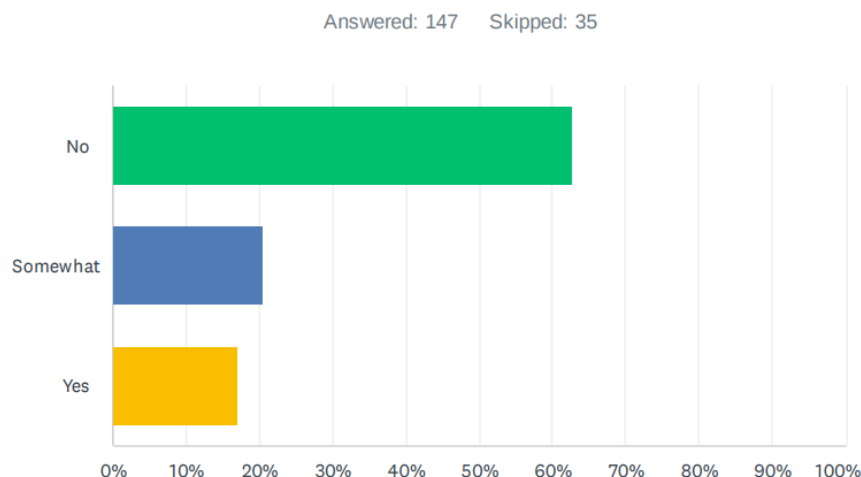
3.27 From an employment perspective, stakeholders generally felt the Covid pandemic would have a beneficial legacy for spouses and partners i.e. some of the barriers described in Section 3 could be broken down by some of the workplace changes arising from the pandemic such as employers offering more flexible working policies, and the greater range of roles available for homeworking. Some employers extend this flexibility even further for spouses e.g. spouses can be exempt from Amazon's 'Return to Office' policy where necessary.

3.28 Some organisations also saw an increase in the number of job applications they received such as the NHS (during and post pandemic) and Barclays.

3.29 As shown in figure 1 below, most of the survey respondents (63%) said that the Covid pandemic had not changed their employment aspirations. Of those that reported the Covid pandemic had changed their employment aspirations (20% saying 'changed somewhat' and 17% saying 'yes'), this generally related to a desire to work remotely or in a hybrid role when asked to expand on their answer.

Figure 1. Whether the Covid pandemic has changed service user employment aspirations.

Q9 Has the Covid pandemic changed your employment aspirations?



3.30 So overall the change in the nature of work towards greater flexibility and remote/hybrid roles may help address some of the barriers to securing employment identified above.

Cost-of-living situation

3.31 Stakeholders believed that the current cost-of-living situation means there is now a greater need for a second income in the household. There were several other interesting observations on this subject from stakeholders:

- i. In this financial environment public sector stakeholders said it was harder to compete with private sector organisations which can generally afford to pay higher salaries. This makes it even more important that the non-financial benefits of public sector employment can be communicated to job seekers.
- ii. Self-employment. Generally, small businesses were particularly badly hit by this financial situation, though the number of spouses interested in starting their own business seems largely unchanged (although the numbers here are small).
- iii. Housing issues¹⁶.
 - a. It was felt the New Accommodation Offer means people may need to buy their own homes sooner, and an additional income may be necessary to make this possible. (It was reported that this model allows a request for Service Families Accommodation (SFA) up to 50 miles from where the service person is based which may help with the spousal employment aspect.)
 - b. There seems to be an increase (though no firm data to support this yet) in the number of people moving back in to SFA, and fewer people currently moving out of SFA into their own homes.
 - c. Some survey respondents reported that the housing policies did not take needing a room in SFA to work from home into account.
- iv. Greater use of MCN hubs in winter. With the very high cost of heating, and the lack of insulation in some of the Defence housing stock, a greater number of people opted to use MCN hubs to work.
- v. Training. One organisation had seen an increase in the number of people applying for – mainly free – training courses.

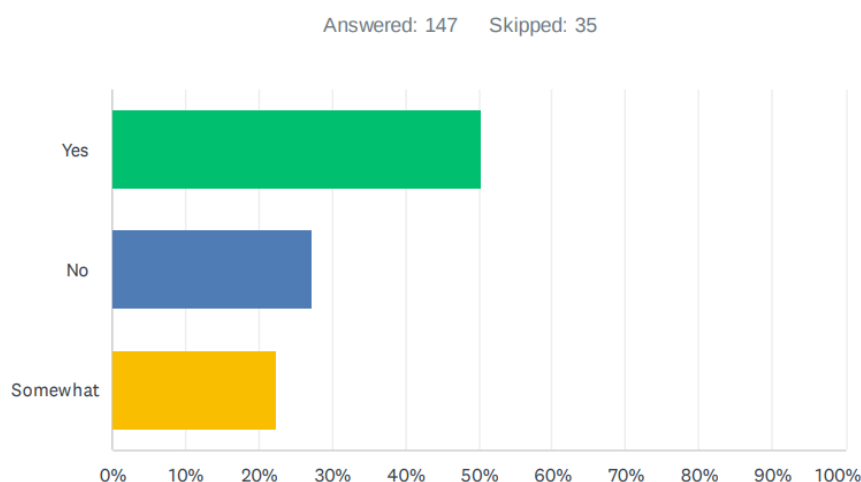
3.32 The survey question about the UK cost-of living crisis and the need to secure employment generated the greatest response of the whole survey with 147 answers. Almost three quarters of people (72%) said the cost-of-living situation had affected them while 27% of people said the situation is not affecting their need to secure employment (figure 2 below). In the 59 free text responses, many people talked about the financial pressures. These ranged from the necessity of

¹⁶ Ministry of Defence current and future housing policies were not included in this review and so no opinion is offered on the validity of the views expressed here.

securing a second income for the household to cover costs e.g. spouses now seeking work after being a parent at home until this point. There were also descriptions of financial pressures on paying bills, decisions to stop studying, and having to make difficult choices about what was affordable.

Figure 2. The effect of the cost-of living crisis.

Q10 Is the current UK cost-of-living crisis affecting your need to secure employment?



3.33 So findings from service users and stakeholders aligned strongly in the opinion that greater household income is needed either through the spouse or partner finding employment, increasing the number of working hours per week, or stopping studying in order to save money and potentially find work. This all highlights the great importance of helping and supporting spouses and partners in their search for suitable employment.

Sub cohorts

3.34 Two sub cohorts were identified during the phase 1 of this review where it was felt additional or bespoke employment support might be required: non-UK spouses and partners, and bereaved spouses. These were explored during stakeholder interviews.

Non-UK spouses and partners

3.35 In the service user survey 17%¹⁷ of respondents reported as non-UK spouses, partners, or adult dependants. This cohort continued through the main survey rather than a different set of questions.

3.36 Some stakeholders felt this cohort might have more immediate priorities than employment, such as securing the correct visa, finance and housing. There were considered to be additional

¹⁷ To caveat this, a lack of shared understanding of the 'non-UK' term became apparent during this review among stakeholders. Some people understood this term to be those people living overseas.

challenges such as not having UK-recognised qualifications and many not being able to drive (felt to be essential in some locations). Whilst there were differences between nationalities, stakeholders reported that non-UK spouses don't tend to reach out as much, making a F2F approach (e.g. an event) more fruitful and culturally important as it shows commitment and value. Some spouses had reportedly accessed the MCN hubs.

3.37 It was also felt that if the spouse or partner does not have strong command of the English language, then self-employment is extremely unlikely to be a viable option. Securing employment can be more difficult in this case, but not impossible. A further complication here is that non-UK families sit within the MOD Welfare Team rather than the MOD Families Team.

3.38 The variety in nationalities identified during this review means a single approach is unlikely to be effective.

Bereaved spouses

3.39 There was one survey response from a bereaved spouse or partner, though this was more than 2 years after their bereavement (making them ineligible for FFJ support)¹⁸. Stakeholders felt that while employment needs may change following a bereavement, bereaved spouses would be hard to reach to offer employment support. Those offering employment support were either aware of having supported bereaved spouses in a small number of cases or were not aware as the question is not explicitly asked. Certainly the timing and messaging would need to be sensitive and appropriate. Bereaved Families sit within the MOD Welfare Team rather than the Families Team – making this approach slightly more difficult. It was felt that the opportunity to access employment support to bereaved spouses could be signposted from within the charity sector, if that charity was providing support on another matter.

Additional sub cohorts

3.40 In addition to these sub cohorts, others were highlighted by stakeholders where they felt additional or bespoke support might be needed:

- i. Divorced/separating spouses. The difficulties a divorced or separating family may face if needing to vacate SFA and secure social housing have been highlighted previously and are now specifically mentioned in the Covenant Duty Statutory Guidance. However, there may also be a pressing need for the spouse or partner to now secure – or change – employment.
- ii. Spouses of Reservists. It was felt these spouses or partners may live away from access to the types of support available to those living in SFA. In addition, they may not have an employer who understands their particular circumstances.
- iii. Dispersed/ unaccompanied spouses. The dispersed spouses of regular service personnel may face similar challenges to those of reservist spouses. Living away from where their spouse works means facilities such as the MCN hubs won't be an option for them.

¹⁸ Since the review was completed, the time limit for bereaved spouses to be eligible for support has been removed <https://www.forcesfamiliesjobs.co.uk/about/>

- iv. Male spouses. Existing employment support refers to 'spouses' and 'partners' and no references to specific gender were identified during this review. That said, the question of how male spouses or partners perceive this support was raised. There may be more male spouses and partners in the future so need to consider the employment support available to them.
- v. Those living in very isolated locations. The nature of the military bases means some spouses may find themselves seeking employment in very isolated parts of the UK where there are an extremely small number of employment opportunities available within a commutable distance. While the greater number of homeworking opportunities may address this to some extent, it may not fully address this difficulty.
- vi. Spouses of those in prison. Some spouses may need to secure employment due to their service person – or former service person – being in custody.

3.41 While these cohorts were identified as potentially having additional employment support needs which may or may not be currently met, more research would be necessary to determine (i) whether there are unique challenges for these cohorts and (ii) whether these needs are being met.

Recommendations:

- 3. Non-UK. Consider grouping cohorts together by characteristics (e.g. level of command of the English language) in order to then work with the various cohorts to understand specific employment needs, support requirements and whether any additional support is needed.
- 4. Bereaved spouses. Consider the opportunities to provide information about FFJ employment support available for bereaved spouses e.g. through the wider Armed Forces Charity Sector where support may be provided on other issues.
- 5. Consider the remaining cohorts identified by stakeholders (either unilaterally or in conjunction with others in the sector) to understand the size and needs of the cohorts and whether there may be unmet need to be addressed.

Policy into Practice

3.42 One employment aspect discussed at the start of this review was whether employers consistently put their Covenant pledges and policies into practice around spousal employment i.e. does practice match policy. Those employers awarded the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) 'Gold' are required to be registered with FFJ in order to obtain and renew their 'Gold' status, and they are featured prominently on FFJ. It was not possible to assess whether employer practice matches policy using the review methodology as an employer would be unlikely to admit to any lapses, and it was not possible to explore this issue in a survey essentially of those seeking employment. However, this topic was discussed with DRM. It is understood that there is a process in place for checking those employers seeking renewal of their 'gold' status which includes checking with FFJ that the employer is actively engaged. This process of checking should hopefully prevent any employers retaining ERS gold status if not delivering on their commitments.

Section 4 – Forces Families Jobs

Introduction and background

4.1 Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) was established following recommendations made in the Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and Support Required (Lyonette et al., 2018)¹⁹. FFJ's creation and subsequent development has been documented continually in the annual UK Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans reports among others.

The FFJ model

4.2 The main elements of the FFJ model are set out below by cohort.

- i. Job seekers:
 - a. There is a job vacancies board that job seekers can search using a number of different filters e.g. geographical area.
 - b. They can post their CV and also create job alerts.
 - c. They can access training and career support.
 - d. They are signposted to events run by other organisations although they cannot register for events through FFJ itself.
- ii. Employers: they can post vacancies and search the CV library.
Recruitment agencies can also post jobs, but they must be their own jobs, they cannot post third party jobs on behalf of another employer or have access to the CV database.
- iii. Training providers: training providers approach FFJ to offer training which is provided at a discounted cost or free of charge. Training should be specifically for this cohort, and/or have a specific forces families discount, and not something that could be found elsewhere on the internet.

4.3 Events offered/advertised on FFJ need to be specifically for military spouses or partners.

4.4 This employment support is free for military spouses/partners according to the eligibility criteria set out on FFJ. Posting job vacancies and training courses is also free.

4.5 In November 2023, FFJ has:

- 1,716 registered employers.
- 82 registered training providers.
- 20,144 registered candidates.
- 21, 131 job responses.
- 10, 293 live jobs advertised on the site²⁰.

4.6 These are extremely impressive statistics and demonstrate both the reach that FFJ has achieved, and the large number of candidates registering for FFJ services.

4.7 The annual cost of FFJ is around £51,100 which includes the cost of the website and associated costs, direct salaries and a proportion of other salaries and overheads (e.g. marketing). In terms of staff resource, there is an administrator for FFJ working 20 hours per week. The administrator is

¹⁹ Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and Support Required. [Employment-Research-report-ONLINE-COPY.pdf](#) Warwick Institute for Employment Research, Lyonette et al., August 2018.

²⁰ 22nd November 2023.

supported by the Employment and Training Specialist at the AFF (7-10 hours per week on FFJ), along with additional support from RAF FF and NFF employment specialists.

Perceptions of the FFJ model

4.8 Stakeholders were asked for their opinion of FFJ. They were overwhelmingly positive about the level of collaboration between the three Families Federations on FFJ and the tri-service nature of FFJ. They also felt the ethos, values and motivations of the three organisations (i.e. not for profit) made them ideally placed to host and deliver FFJ. Stakeholders believed FFJ to be a good concept and sound model, doing a great job with very limited resources. The Federations are impartial and act only in the best interests of spouses – so they can act as an ‘honest broker’. The impressive reach of FFJ with employers was also referred to positively several times. The decision of the Federations to commission an independent review of FFJ to help determine future direction was also commended.

4.9 Employers and trainers greatly appreciated the opportunity and access to this platform, enabling them to reach a large pool of high calibre people, and at the same time being able to publicly demonstrate their commitment and support for members of the Armed Forces Community. An example of benefits from using FFJ to an employer was Barclays who had seen lots more applications in areas such as Customer Service since putting more resource into recruiting through FFJ.

4.10 Most survey respondents (71%) felt that FFJ offered them relevant employment support to varying degrees. This percentage reduced slightly when asked whether service users would use FFJ in the future when looking for employment or training support - 58% would.

4.11 From a very positive endorsement of the organisations and the FFJ model, there was quite a lot of commonality in terms of what works well, and also many areas identified for what could be improved, with very strong views on the way forward.

FFJ Website - general

4.12 Looking initially at the FFJ website generally, two thirds of respondents had looked at the FFJ website prior to completing the survey and their responses are included below. 97% of survey respondents reported having regular access to a good internet connection, although there may be a degree of survey bias as those without regular internet access may have been less likely to try and complete the survey.

4.13 In terms of how service users found out about FFJ, of the 95 who answered, the largest source was the Families Federations (41%), followed by ‘other social media’ (i.e. not FFJ) (22%), and similar levels of response for ‘search engine’ (13%), ‘from a friend’ (13%) and FFJ social media (12%).

4.14 In terms of hosting the FFJ website, the only possible alternative suggested was for it to become a MOD outsource such as with CTP. However, this would significantly change every aspect of FFJ and may not be something MOD would be willing to consider. So the conclusion reached is that the FFJ website should remain within AFF/ broader Families Federation management.

Website appearance and functionality

4.15 Stakeholders were mixed in their views on the website appearance and functionality (with some having seen it from a candidate perspective as well as an employer). The positives included finding the site clear and accessible, with lots of content accessible without needing to register. ERS (Gold) employers also appreciated the prominent status given to their organisation on the website.

4.16 In terms of how service users engaged with FFJ, 46% of respondents do this using a phone or tablet, 28% use a computer, 21% engage through Facebook and 4% through LinkedIn. When asked about ease of navigation on the website, 39% of respondents found it easy or very easy, 55% were neutral, and 6% found it difficult or very difficult to navigate. When respondents were asked whether they had any further feedback on the functionality of the FFJ website or social media posts, 18 service users provided feedback, included in table 2 below.

Table 2. Survey user comments on website functionality (responses pasted as written).

1	More remote opportunities shared, more events in certain areas like job fairs etc
2	you Need to register with a CV to access the site, can this be removed so it's not a hurdle. Many people tailor a CV specifically for a job rather than have a generic one.
3	I've found ones that summarise policy change helpful.
4	its not the easiest to navigate - although it is better on a laptop than mobile.
5	A very good website, thank you
6	Better filters on website for narrowing down location & job roles
7	No, the website was easy to use and navigate.
8	Only see posts if there shared through third party such as Royal Navy welfare Facebook page
9	The whole thing for me is nonsense. If you want to support spouses then provide more opportunities for flexible working and stability for military personnel. Or increase their salary to cover the loss of ours.
10	It's all a bit....dull? Very corporate. Maybe the feel you're going for but it's very forgettable.
11	It's pointless as the army don't support spousal work so unless you have no children it doesn't work and it never works for someone with a disabled child who don't have access to after school club ect
12	Locations haven't suited me.

4.17 The report now moves on to consider the individual elements of the website in more detail.

FFJ Jobs Board

4.18 One unique feature of FFJ is the jobs board function, as nobody else offers anything of this nature and scale to spouses and partners. This board contains an extensive number and range of vacancies that can be viewed without registering.

4.19 Most survey respondents had looked for job vacancies on the FFJ site (84%) and 19% had uploaded their CV to the FFJ website. When asked whether they had applied for a job through FFJ, 81% had not applied for a job while 19% had applied for a job, with the number of applications varying between 1 and 14+. The number of respondents answering the question about whether they had been invited to interview for a role they had applied for through FFJ, this number reduced to 14, and of these, 43% had been invited to interview. In the final question in this thread, 3 respondents said they had been offered a job following an application through FFJ. There were a

broad range of reasons given by respondents for the factors that led them not to apply for a role through FFJ, but the top three reasons were lack of flexibility, location of the role, and the salary too low. Overall, when asked how likely the person would be to recommend FFJ to other spouses and partners seeking employment, 43% would recommend FFJ, 39% might recommend, and 19% would not recommend.

4.20 Armed Forces Covenant signatories. There was a suggestion that if securing spousal employment was the main priority, then why limit the employers able to post vacancies to just those who had signed the Armed Forces Covenant. However, this was countered by the fact that spouses felt that as employers were demonstrating support for them through signing the Covenant, that this was a warm and supportive environment which made them feel reassured. This therefore seems an important criterion to retain in policy.

Other FFJ web pages

4.21 FFJ offers a range of other employment support services on additional webpages, primarily through signposting to other organisations/websites offering these services rather than delivering directly. Feedback on other FFJ webpages came exclusively from service users through the survey and are covered here:

- i. Training. Most of the survey respondents (78%) had not looked at training courses advertised on FFJ. Of those who had, only 1 person had enrolled onto a training course advertised on FFJ and, at the time of responding, that person was not sure whether completing the course helped them find the employment they are seeking. In terms of recommending FFJ to other spouses looking for training courses, 38% would recommend FFJ, 38% might recommend FFJ, 25% would not recommend FFJ.
- ii. Starting Own Business. Most of the survey respondents had not looked at FFJ to find out more about starting their own business (88%). For those who had, all but one respondent had gone on to contact the key organisations offering specific support in this area. When asked if the information from these organisations had led them to starting their own business or think more seriously about starting their own business, 2 people went on to start their own business, 1 person is thinking seriously about starting their own business, and 4 people felt the information did not help.
- iii. Career Support services. Of the 75 people who responded, 96% had not used FFJ to access any career support services. Of those who had, this resulted in positive feedback from the organisations approached.
- iv. Volunteering. Of the 74 people who responded, 96% had not looked at volunteering information. Of the two people who did, one person has gone on to volunteer, and one person has not.
- v. Employment support programmes. None of the 73 survey respondents had used FFJ to apply for any employment support programmes.
- vi. Apprenticeships. Of the 72 people who responded, 99% had not used FFJ to access any apprenticeship opportunities. For the person who had used FFJ for this purpose, they went

on to approach all the organisations listed on FFJ offering apprenticeships. Unfortunately this did not result in them securing an apprenticeship.

- vii. Events. When asked about the events promoted on the FFJ website, 79% of survey respondents were not aware of them. 11% were aware but unable to attend, and 1% did attend and plans to go to more events.

4.22 It is not possible to determine whether these webpages (4.21) are less frequently used than the jobs board because the level of need is low, or because service users are not aware of these services, or another reason entirely. The name 'Forces Families Jobs' may lead people to believe FFJ is exclusively about the jobs board aspect, though the strapline indicates broader provision.

4.23 Remaining webpages. There are a number of other webpages on FFJ which were not included in the service user survey (due to survey length) or mentioned by stakeholders. These pages are:

- Events - News.
- About us – Our Partners.
- Job Seekers - Success Stories.
- Training and Career Support - Funding Available.

Aspects of these pages are covered later.

What works well with the website?

4.24 Stakeholders had some very positive comments about the job vacancies advertised. With such a broad ranging cohort in terms of employment aspirations, qualifications, locations, it was felt there was something for everyone. FFJ's reach, strong connection, and good relationships with employers had attracted big employers to FFJ and the multi-poster functionality was considered a huge benefit. The inclusion of the Civil Service vacancies – Going Forward Into Employment – was welcomed as offering a great opportunity.

What could be improved with the website?

4.25 On the website overall, stakeholders suggested a number of key areas for improvement (in no particular order):

- i. Data/analytics. Being able to use data to demonstrate the value of FFJ in a quantifiable way would bring many benefits such as potentially attracting more employers or funding e.g. being able to say how many spouses had secured employment directly through FFJ. But this is a very challenging task. Currently data is collected monthly on:
- Candidate registrations.
 - Employer registrations.
 - Job views.
 - Job responses.
 - Visitors to the site (through Google analytics).

Data is also available for individual employers based on their number of posts.

While this demonstrates the level of activity, it does not provide the holy grail data of the number of spouses who have secured their desired employment through job vacancies advertised on FFJ. Some employers have internal reporting systems to identify the route into employment which may help identify the number of successful candidates, though contacting every employer to seek this information (where available) would be extremely time-consuming. It may not be possible to extract any more meaningful data than is currently being collected, and so a greater reliance on case studies/success stories (from employers and candidates) may be the alternative route to demonstrating outcomes and impact.

Recommendations:

6. Commission the services of a data specialist to determine whether it is possible to extract more data using facilities on Google, Broadbean or Hot Lizard.

7. Share activity data currently available across all audiences. Although it doesn't show all the outcomes/impact, there is still a very impressive activity level e.g. to spouses: "we have x number of employers looking to recruit people like you" (or similar).

- ii. Comms activity including social media. The need to increase the level and nature of communication featured regularly and emphatically through the stakeholder interviews, covering every aspect of communication, all suggesting FFJ needed a higher profile, more proactive communication, and a stronger online presence:
 - a. More general communication, including social media activity. Without the ability and consent to contact spouses directly initially, reaching them through a range of communication activity, including social media, was believed to be very important. This is communication with spouses, but also communication to other organisations offering employment support to spouses and partners. Consider all social media platforms to determine whether more of these could be used.
 - b. More case studies/video diaries. The existing video clips on FFJ are engaging and help to bring stories to life. They may resonate with spouses browsing the site and to help inspire them. There was a suggestion that more of these should be created and featured through a range of channels.
 - c. More proactive posting of job vacancies. Having a regular means of reaching out to those registered with FFJ (either on the site or through an uploaded CV) could receive periodic mailings offering new job postings, and other items offering support.

Recommendation 8:

Undertake a review across all communication activity to see how communication improvements could be made.

- iii. Employer/trainers. Employers and trainers identified several areas where they believed FFJ could be improved:

- a. Profiles/personalisation. The stakeholders who were interviewed were passionate about supporting spouses (many are/were service spouses themselves), and many gave examples of the types of policies and activities they offer to show their support and to try to attract spouses. They were keen to be able to market themselves through more than some text on a static webpage e.g. video clips, case studies. Many of the employer organisations may not be familiar to job seekers, or they may have incorrect perceptions of the types of roles available with that employer e.g. the NHS is more than clinical staff, and Marks & Spencer is more than shop floor staff.
- b. Engagement. While most stakeholders were very positive about the level of engagement with FFJ, comments from a couple of people in post more recently showed confusion about FFJ services (e.g. it being free to advertise). Scheduling regular engagement or check-ins, particularly for newly appointed people, could help with these important relationships.
- c. Job vacancy uploading function. The ability of an employer to upload job vacancies in a quick and easy way is key to securing the maximum number of job vacancies possible. This process will vary by the size of the organisation and also the sector. Large private companies will generally pay to use multi-poster functions and be able to upload multiple vacancies easily, although Amazon flagged up the challenge of uploading thousands of job vacancies. Due to the cost of subscribing to a multi-poster function e.g. Broadbean, many public sector bodies or smaller organisations may not have this type of functionality. Through working with FFJ some workarounds have been put in place (e.g. using an excel spreadsheet). With a smaller organisation which may only have a couple of vacancies a year, these may need to be entered more individually.
- d. CV search. Not every employer interviewed used the CV search function. A couple of the employers had used this function on FFJ, though not with great success. This may be due to a mismatch in the terminology used by a candidate and by an employer, there may be a small number of spouses with the particular skills sought, or the search algorithms may not be as effective as they could be.

Recommendations:

9. Employer profiles. Engage with employers to determine how their profile on FFJ may be more personalised, dynamic and inspiring for job seekers. Suggestions included video clips, or a more exciting profile page. Given the number of registered employers on FFJ this would be a very resource heavy exercise so deciding a phased approach or order of priority may be helpful.

10. Engagement. Consider how to build in regular engagement with employers in as efficient a way as possible e.g. periodic email updates, a quarterly group video call (e.g. Zoom, Teams) open to all, as well as periodic meetings would ensure that as staff change, employers remain up-to-date on FFJ.

11. Job vacancy uploading function. The ability to upload jobs to FFJ seems to vary between organisations, depending on the resources available to them. Review the process and see if more could be done to open up more opportunities for posting job vacancies.

12. CV search. Employers searching for candidates through FFJ CVs, presents a great opportunity for spouses and partners, which may not be being maximised currently. Consider whether more could be suggested to candidates around key words to include in their CV to ensure maximum pick up, perhaps through a webinar on the topic, through a blog, or email updates.

iv. Website.

- a. While feelings about the FFJ website were mixed, the majority felt it needed to be updated. It was felt to be slightly out-of-date in appearance against some of the newer and shinier websites in this sector and also slightly 'clunky'. The navigation function was also felt to be an area for improvement.
- b. Job vacancies. There were a couple of suggestions relating to the job vacancy and search functions:
 - 1) The list of countries to search in FFJ is extensive, and the majority seem surplus to requirements either in terms of posting location, or the likelihood of job vacancies being offered there for spouses. This list could be reduced significantly to make it more streamlined and relevant.
 - 2) Types of roles and compatibility with spousal aspirations. Some of the roles were either considered to be in the wrong type of location or the type of job not feasible. Considering individual job vacancies would not be feasible given the number advertised. It could, however, be worth looking at some of the categories of jobs to see whether they are gaps e.g. in teaching.
 - 3) Make the difference between FFJ and sites such as Indeed or Right job more distinct. Be clearer on how FFJ is different.

Recommendations:

13. Commission a review and upgrade of the FFJ website, including aspects like functionality and accessibility.

14. Either as part of the review above, or as a separate exercise, update the job search function to make it more accessible e.g. reducing the list of countries to those where job vacancies are likely to be available (including splitting the UK into 4 individual countries), considering professional areas e.g. teaching, and being clearer on what makes FFJ distinct from other job vacancy sites.

- v. Eligibility check. One stakeholder confirmed they had recruited an employee through FFJ, though that person had no connection to the Armed Forces Community. In addition, one of the employers who had used the CV search function felt there were some CVs seemed unlikely to be for spouses. With the ease of access to FFJ, it is possible that the sight is being used by those it is not intended to support, though the extent of any misuse is not known. There is a balance to be struck as a stringent eligibility check process may deter genuine spouses seeking employment support.

Recommendation:

15. Decide whether action should be taken on more stringent verification of eligibility, or whether the issue of ineligible people using the site is tolerable. If there is a desire to tighten up this area then consider whether there is a light-touch process which would deter those ineligible, without deterring those FFJ is set up to help.

4.26 There were also open responses from service users about what else they would like to see on the FFJ website to help support their journey into employment or adult education (table 3 below). Some responses seem to be worth considering more than others as there is huge variety.

Table 3. Responses to what else service users would like to see on FFJ (responses pasted as written).

1	Help with CV's, how to speak to employers about flexibility due to deployments etc
2	Advice on gaining support for working from home
3	Jobs willing to accept people with limited qualifications and to train them.
4	Coaching and mentoring.
5	Smaller hour jobs Bank jobs Jobs with less qualifications needed
6	Remote working and part time jobs that can also be done over seas
7	training for families overseas
8	I know so many military spouses that NEED work-from-home roles. I feel Forces Families Jobs need to work with more companies to facilitate this. I dislike the employment agencies on Family Forces Jobs as there is no guarantee of work. I cannot afford to put my baby in childcare "just in case" I get work that day. The jobs are predominantly minimum wage and things like bar staff or waitressing. I spent thousands on my 4 year degree specifically to earn more than minimum wage and work hours that don't fit around having children.
9	More specific information on how the companies help support military families. I seem to encounter many spouses (especially heee overseas) who are nurses or teachers. Funding or

	training specific to those roles to cover gaps would be helpful. I'm currently funding my own doctorate whilst overseas (which was previously paid for by my employer!)
10	More jobs I can do from Cyprus at home
11	assisting with jobs and the application process.
12	More remote jobs
13	To join armed forces
14	More jobs around Salisbury
15	More employment opportunities advertised for areas such as North Wales.
16	More remote roles. I personally prefer remote roles that I can take with me when we move
17	I couldn't find anything relating to my circumstances, career change from finance roles in the civil service to becoming a midwife. All of the courses etc aren't relevant or taken into account. When briefly looking for a part time role to support me around my degree there wasn't anything quite relevant for ultimate flexible working.
18	Advice on volunteer opportunities in serving community areas. Advice on adding volunteering skills to a CV.
19	Opportunities which meet the needs of a military spouse with children. The understanding that spouses do not always have the parent to help with childcare so need flexibility.
20	More part time jobs, more jobs in my area of Scotland, more work at home opportunities
21	It's just ludicrous, the fact remains that we haven't got any childcare or support from our spouses so a website with jobs and courses we can't attend in person or don't have time to attend virtually as we are doing everything ourselves is just a laughable and insulting tick box exercise
22	There are too many jobs that are in no way suitable for a transient life. They may be "forces friendly" - but being based at locations miles away from base locations is pointless. You could do with a "100% remote" jobs section to make thing easier to navigate and to support the vast majority of us who can't commit to locations. Also need a lot more good quality part time roles (not cleaner or bar staff etc)
23	Support for helping conversation with my employer when being posted abroad to keep employment
24	More short supplementary CPD for those already employed with good qualifications but want to boost cv in case of moves etc
25	higher level FREE courses which you can add to CV.. not just learn how to write CV
26	I have found the website not very intuitive and the level of support and feedback has been poor
27	Remote working opportunities
28	Navigate support with the army as wives working is no importance and children are expected to be sent anywhere for childcare but with the serving parent
29	More aspirational careers, not just ones that 'fit' the supportive spouse narrative.
30	Job roles in specific areas such as teaching.
31	Being about to claim the Wrap Around Childcare when retraining. I want to go back to University to train to be a teacher but cannot do so due to childcare costs and a husband who can't help with childcare.
32	More professionally qualified jobs by location
33	1-1 support and feedback
34	How exactly the companies listed support military families.
35	What support there is for childcare and what to do if your education falls outside a childcare provision and the serving person can't help with childcare...

Recommendation:

16. Consider the service user suggestions for what else could be included within FFJ to determine which ideas could be taken forward, noting that several responses align with the stakeholder suggestions covered above.

Future ideas

4.27 There were a range of suggestions from stakeholders on what FFJ should do in the future, though it was suggested that starting with agreeing – and communicating – FFJ values, vision and mission would help focus subsequent activity. Future ideas then fell into two main areas: collaboration, and then other activities.

Future collaboration

4.28 Stakeholders were keen to collaborate or continue to collaborate in the following activities:

- i. F2F activity. Employers and trainers were particularly keen to have the opportunity to interact with spouses seeking employment in person. That direct F2F contact would give employers the opportunity to market their offer and the types of roles available personally. This could be in the form of spouse-specific job fairs if there were felt to be enough spouses in one location to make it feasible. Alternatively, this could be done in partnership with CTP or MOD to broaden existing employment fairs to include spouses (a more resource-efficient option). This personal contact can show that spouses are valued and is particularly welcomed in some cultural contexts e.g. the Fijian community.
- ii. Develop/produce more webinars. Some webinars have already been delivered through FFJ, but employers and trainers were keen to see more. These could be delivered by FFJ on relevant topics e.g. confidence building, or promoting more webinars delivered by others. It could be a great vehicle for covering a wide range of topics and featuring large employers with a large range of employment opportunities. The webinars could cover a range of employment support related topics.
- iii. Enable the sharing of best practice between employers. Some stakeholders were understandably very proud of their 'spouse friendly' policies and support programmes. They also seemed keen to share these with other employers. Sharing employer best practice when it comes to spouses may fall within DRM's remit, but there is possibly a role for FFJ to enable/facilitate this further. This could also extend into the creation of 'Spousal Ambassador' employer or trainer roles to champion the benefits of employing spouses.
- iv. Collaborate to share success. Spousal success in one aspect of employment could be celebrated across many charities, whether the spouse has benefitted from that organisation directly or not. For example, X-Forces Enterprise have case studies on their website featuring spouses. A collaborative approach to celebrate this success might stimulate the thought of starting a business for spouses, or highlight other options for spouses.

Recommendation:

17. Consider these suggestions for future collaboration to determine whether/how they should be taken forward.

Other ideas for the future

- i. Offer more holistic support. There were stakeholder suggestions that FFJ could – rather than predominantly signpost to others – offer a more holistic approach to employment support directly (though noting the risk of exacerbating duplication with expanding the support offered).
- ii. Rationalise the offer to focus on key areas such as Jobs board. Some functions on FFJ seem to feature more prominently – and be accessed more by service users – than others. For example, the job vacancy board is unique in the sector, and was the most visited webpage, while the apprenticeships page was much less sought (4.21). Possibly consider each webpage individually – using the service user survey to support that – and decide whether to rationalise and reduce potentially less useful pages (e.g. the funding available page). Having fewer bases covered might free up greater resource to focus on the greatest need.
- iii. Support for spouses/partners of those in transition. Stakeholders talked about the point where a serving person leaving the Armed Forces is often a time of change in employment for spouses too. The ‘transition’ may affect both spouses, and therefore could more be offered – in conjunction with, and promoted by, CTP – to support spouses. This was echoed in the ‘blurring’ of boundaries between spouses and veterans i.e. a veteran may also be a spouse and vice versa, offering more potential opportunities for cross-referring.
- iv. Self-assessment tool. There was a suggestion that for those non-UK spouses coming to the UK, a tool to help assess how their qualifications aligned with UK qualifications would be helpful.
- v. Chat room. There was a suggestion that offering a chat room function on FFJ to enable spouses to talk to each other, or potentially for spouses and employers to talk would be helpful. However providing a chat room function which is monitored, controlled and managed is an extremely labour-intensive task, requiring careful vetting of those seeking access and close monitoring of what is posted. On balance this is possibly best enabled through social media channels such as Facebook, and not within FFJ.

Recommendation:

18. Consider these suggestions for the future direction of FFJ to determine whether/how they should be taken forward.

Section 5 – The Future

5.1 While stakeholders strongly supported the continuance of FFJ – and as a Families Federation resource - there was also a strong response to where FFJ could do more, and how it should operate in the future. Equally, there were positive responses from service users but, again, with suggestions for the future. Continuing in its current form was not really considered desirable or sustainable in the future by stakeholders as FFJ would become diminished by other organisations innovating and growing more strongly in the sector.

5.2 Service users are at the heart of FFJ, and the most important thing is to provide the best possible employment support to beneficiaries in a sustainable way. Based on the findings of this review, this would require two courses of action. The first is to improve and enhance the employment support offer of FFJ in the areas identified in this review. The second course of action is to ensure the strength and profile of FFJ in a growing and maturing spousal employment support sector, continuing to be respected and credible as others around are growing, and to avoid the risk of reducing traction with spouses and partners. To achieve both courses of action, and develop an effective and sustainable FFJ into the future, there are a number of options to consider around two different operating models:

Enhancement of FFJ's current model/offer

5.3 FFJ could remain in its current model and as a resource of the Families Federations. However, in addition to the current annual cost of approximately £51,100, additional resources would be required to make the necessary changes to the website, services and offer. There are a number of ways these core costs and additional resources could be secured:

- i. Funding from MOD/AFCFT/other funders. With evidence of strong support and need for FFJ provided through this review, funding could be sought from MOD (citing workstream 7 in the Families Strategy), AFCFT or other funders. However, these are difficult times for seeking grant funding, and this option would not provide long-term stability for FFJ. The project would move from grant to grant and funding applications themselves require considerable time and energy.
- ii. Develop a 'Partners' programme with funding for an enhanced offer. The 'Our Partners' webpage on FFJ seems to be a legacy from when FFJ was initially established. The nine organisations listed seemed to have supported FFJ with initial funding, or professional services at no charge or reduced cost. But it is unclear what role (if any) is played currently by these partners. These 'partners' could be moved into a subsidiary webpage dedicated to acknowledging and thanking those that helped FFJ originally. Then a new corporate partners/ friends of / supporters scheme could be established which could involve an offer for organisations which contribute financially, and receive particular recognition or benefits (perhaps acting as 'Ambassadors' for spousal employment thereby enhancing their employer status). Although this type of scheme would be unlikely to cover the core and additional costs of FFJ, it could help subsidise the cost of FFJ. As with grant funding there is unlikely to be long-term stability with a scheme like this.
- iii. Seeking funding from the RN, Army or RAF for specific posts. Another way of securing temporary specialist resource in areas such as communications or with website support, is through seeking funding from the RN, Army or RAF for additional posts to address specific need. For example, Air Command [funded the recruitment of an extra post within the RAF](#)

Families Federation contract to develop the Families Federation website as the information portal for supporting RAF people and their families who are serving overseas. With the evidence to demonstrate a need for more communications then an approach relating to FFJ is possible.

5.4 Some stakeholders believed that FFJ could generate income from charging employers for services, based on a belief that employers would expect to pay for the type of recruitment services provided by FFJ. While this hypothesis was deliberately not tested with employers during this review, one employer voluntarily stated that they would not pay to recruit through FFJ as they have several other routes to recruits available. This could also be problematic given the strong relationship with existing employers advertising vacancies on FFJ who may go elsewhere if asked to start paying. Therefore it is not recommended to consider this option as a means of income generation.

Partnership model

5.5 A second way to offer a broader package of employment support to spouses is through partnership with another organisation with a similar model, ethos and values. In this case the suggestion is with the Forces Employment Charity (FEC). The FEC runs a Families Programme with an impressive reach on the ground and is about to expand further to meet increasing need. It is understood this Families Programme was developed in lock step with FFJ. From 100 beneficiaries helped in 2019 by the FEC, this number has increased with 574 beneficiaries having been helped so far this year. FEC is expanding in 2024 to respond to the increased need (see 3.17). With a slightly different offer from FFJ i.e. more physical contact from FEC versus the FFJ website offer, but a similar ethos and values as a charity in the sector, the partnership could become greater than the sum of its parts. With complementary offers, a more holistic package of employment support could be offered to spouses and partners – both organisations already signpost to each other and work together with a shared aim. In addition, with the combined influence, credibility and reach of the organisations involved, the result could provide overall leadership and direction in this sector which may help make the landscape clearer for everyone over time. There should also be resource efficiencies which may benefit both organisations. FEC has evolved from a successful merger of the Forces Employment Charity and the Officers' Association employment services. This shows merger/partnership precedent and has made FEC a leading organisation in the veterans employment sector.

5.6 There was a suggestion of FFJ partnering/incorporating MCN. This could be an idea to explore either in conjunction with the FEC or separately.

5.7 No partnership possibilities were tested during this review. With stakeholder relationships being critically important, nothing was done during this review to potentially damage relationships or to 'set hares running'.

Recommendation:

19. The main options outlined here are not mutually exclusive, and elements of all the suggestions set out above could be considered in conjunction. FFJ should consider the options proposed and explore those option that feel the most desirable for FFJ.

Section 6 – Conclusion

6.1 There is strong evidence of the unique barriers and challenges faced by spouses and partners seeking employment, and over the last few years more focus, resource and effort is being directed here to try and address these. This review began by considering the context within FFJ operates and found that this growing focus is resulting in duplication of provision in some cases (with positive and negative connotations) and potential confusion. However, there were also felt to be gaps in the provision of support in some areas. A number of sub-cohorts were identified where additional or bespoke employment support may be needed. While it was felt that Covid pandemic may have resulted in a workplace offering more flexibility to spouses and partners, the effect of the cost-of-living crisis is having more negative and worrying consequences. Stakeholders and service users all highlighted the necessity for a greater household income, which demonstrates the vital imperative of helping spouses and partners with their employment aspirations and a route to alleviating any financial difficulties.

6.2 Having considered the environment within which FFJ operates, the evaluation went on to consider FFJ itself in terms of how it is perceived (by service users and stakeholders), what is done well, what could be improved, and future direction. Overall, FFJ is valued and respected, demonstrating great collaboration between three highly respected Federations. There were many examples of what FFJ is considered to do well by both service users and stakeholders. There are also areas identified for improvement, and many suggestions for its future direction as the Federations continue to strive to deliver the best possible employment support for their spouses and partners. The review found that if FFJ continues to operate as it does currently, it will likely become diminished over time as other organisations develop and innovate in the sector, and the current weaknesses in FFJ impact further on its effectiveness. The review has identified a number of ways in which FFJ could enhance its offer of employment support and options for how this growth may be achieved. There is a great opportunity here for FFJ and the Families Federations to take up a stronger strategic leadership role in this maturing sector and also thereby achieving the best possible package of employment support for spouses and partners.

Section 7 – Summary of Recommendations

Section 3 - Context

1. Ask DRM whether they would be willing and able to share the results relating to spousal employment from their annual Employer Survey.
2. To note the possible gaps in employment support identified by stakeholders and consider whether there may be unmet need which needs to be addressed (noting that some of these areas are also explored more fully later in the report).
3. Non-UK. Consider grouping cohorts together by characteristics (e.g. level of command of the English language) in order to then work with the various cohorts to understand specific employment needs, support requirements and whether any additional support is needed.
4. Bereaved spouses. Consider the opportunities to provide information about FFJ employment support available for bereaved spouses e.g. through the wider Armed Forces Charity Sector where support may be provided on other issues.
5. Consider the remaining cohorts identified by stakeholders (either unilaterally or in conjunction with others in the sector) to understand the size and needs of the cohorts and whether there may be unmet need to be addressed.

Section 4 – Forces Families Jobs

6. Commission the services of a data specialist to determine whether it is possible to extract more data using facilities on Google, Broadbean or Hot Lizard.
7. Share activity data currently available across all audiences. Although it doesn't show all the outcomes/impact, there is still a very impressive activity level e.g. to spouses: "we have x number of employers looking to recruit people like you" (or similar).
8. Undertake a review across all communication activity to see how communication improvements could be made.
9. Employer profiles. Engage with employers to determine how their profile on FFJ may be more personalised, dynamic and inspiring for job seekers. Suggestions included video clips, or a more exciting profile page. Given the number of registered employers on FFJ this would be a very resource heavy exercise so deciding a phased approach or order of priority may be helpful.
10. Engagement. Consider how to build in regular engagement with employers in as efficient a way as possible e.g. periodic email updates, a quarterly group video call (e.g. Zoom, Teams) open to all, as well as periodic meetings would ensure that as staff change, employers remain up-to-date on FFJ.
11. Job vacancy uploading function. The ability to upload jobs to FFJ seems to vary between organisations, depending on the resources available to them. Review the process and see if more could be done to open up more opportunities for posting job vacancies.
12. CV search. Employers searching for candidates through FFJ CVs, presents a great opportunity for spouses and partners, which may not be being maximised currently. Consider whether more could

be suggested to candidates around key words to include in their CV to ensure maximum pick up, perhaps through a webinar on the topic, through a blog, or email updates.

13. Commission a review and upgrade of the FFJ website, including aspects like functionality and accessibility.

14. Either as part of the review above, or as a separate exercise, update the job search function to make it more accessible e.g. reducing the list of countries to those where job vacancies are likely to be available (including splitting the UK into 4 individual countries), considering professional areas e.g. teaching, and being clearer on what makes FFJ distinct from other job vacancy sites.

15. Decide whether action should be taken on more stringent verification of eligibility, or whether the issue of ineligible people using the site is tolerable. If there is a desire to tighten up this area then consider whether there is a light-touch process which would deter those ineligible, without deterring those FFJ is set up to help.

16. Consider the service user suggestions for what else could be included within FFJ to determine which could be taken forward. Several responses align with the stakeholder suggestions above.

17. Consider these suggestions for future collaboration to determine whether/how they should be taken forward.

18. Consider these suggestions for the future direction of FFJ to determine whether/how they should be taken forward.

Section 5 – The Future

19. The main options outlined here are not mutually exclusive, and elements of all the suggestions set out above could be considered in conjunction. FFJ should consider the options proposed and explore those option that feel the most desirable for FFJ.

Annexes:

- A. Methodology.
- B. Other organisations operating in this sector.
- C. Generic discussion guide.
- D. External stakeholder list.
- E. Document list.
- F. Points raised outside of the scope.

Annex A – Methodology

The methodology for phase 2 is set out here in more detail.

Stakeholder Interviews

External stakeholders included employers, trainers, the Ministry of Defence, and organisations delivering employment services or support to the spouses and partners of those serving in the Armed Forces (charities and other organisational entities). A generic version of the discussion guide (which was tailored accordingly) is at Annex C, and a full list of external stakeholders is at Annex D. Internal stakeholders included the employment specialists within the three Families Federations and Forces Families Jobs.

The stakeholder interviews were all very useful and positive, with great respect for the Families Federations being very apparent. The nature of this collaborative approach, and the commissioning of an independent review were also the subject of positive comment.

There were two proposed external stakeholder interviews that did not take place. The interview with CTP was not taken forward once it had been clarified that the CTP relet did not make provision for spousal employment support, and the stakeholder at Accountancy Learning did not respond so has perhaps left the company.

Service User survey

The survey was circulated through the three Families Federations using their respective branding in order to attract as many responses as possible. The number of responses – 182 – exceeded previous responses to a similar survey as there were 52 responses in 2021, and no responses in 2022. It is not possible to determine whether the greater response rate was due to growing interest in this topic, a more successful communication approach, or for another reason.

There were two routes through the survey. The primary route was for those eligible for FFJ services, and the secondary route was for those not eligible but where feedback was considered useful. Of the 182 respondents, 170 were eligible and continued through the full survey (the majority of whom were the spouse or partner of someone serving). The 12 who were not eligible completed a shorter survey. There were further filters with questions for those who had visited the FFJ website prior to completing the survey, and those who had not.

Of the 170 eligible people, the number answering each question varied considerably. The majority of responses were from those living in England and smaller numbers from Scotland, Overseas²¹ and Northern Ireland (no responses from Wales). 87% of the 168 respondents held qualifications of A' levels or above with around two thirds having a bachelor's degree or higher. Service user responses are included within the relevant section of this report.²²

The survey questions document and full responses document are available from the three Families Federations on request. There are not included in this annex due to the number of questions (47 in

²¹ Although those based overseas were excluded from the scope of this review, it was felt helpful to understand how much FFJ was being accessed from this cohort, and for what purpose.

²² Service user response percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

total) and the confusion in interpreting the results which may be caused by having two routes through the survey.

Review limitation

Due to the length of the MODREC process, as well as the uncertainty about whether ethical approval would be granted, this review does not include interviews with service users. As the views of this cohort are essential, a comprehensive survey was designed to gather as much useful information as was feasible.

Annex B – Other Organisations Operating in this Sector

* Indicates those organisations included in the stakeholder interviews, with main services shown in brackets.

1. The Forces Employment Charity* (Advice on career choices, Researching the job market, Advice on training, Recommendations for courses and education, Support for writing a CV, Advice on interview techniques, Expert industry knowledge and updates, Events and employment fairs) [Forces Employment Charity](#)
2. Salute My Job* (job vacancies) [Jobs for UK Ex-Military and their Families - SaluteMyJob](#) and incorporating including Troopr (newly launched, 'one stop shop') [Troopr - Home](#)
3. Career Pursuit* (one-stop resource hub) [Career Pursuit](#)
4. Milspo* (business network) [HOME - Milspo • The Milspo Business Network](#)
5. RBLi Lifeworks programme* (training) [Lifeworks Royal British Legion Industries](#)
6. British Forces Resettlement Services (help with CV writing and employment fairs) [bfrss.org.uk](#)
7. Recruit for spouses* (recruitment and career academy) [Recruit for Spouses - Returning talent to the workplace : RFS](#)
8. British Forces Broadcasting Service (social media academy) [BFBS, serving the Armed Forces | BFBS](#)
9. X-Forces Enterprises* (self-employment and business start-up support) [X-Forces Enterprise - Helping You Be The Best in Business](#)
10. Supporting the Unsung Hero* (self-employment support) [Supporting The Unsung Hero](#)
11. Heropreneurs (mentoring) [Mentoring Community Excellence | Heropreneurs](#)
12. Military Co-Working Network* (training, events and hubs) [Home | Military Coworking Network](#)
13. Forces CV writing service (help with CVs) [Forces CV's - Professional CVs for Armed Forces Veterans & Emergency Services \(forces-cvs.co.uk\)](#)

The only additional group offering spousal employment support identified in the course of this evaluation was 'Spouse Force' [Spouse Force | Catterick Camp | Facebook](#) which operates a Facebook page at Catterick Garrison for spouses. At the time of writing it has 762 followers.

Annex C – Generic Discussion Guide

Introduction

- Thank you for making time to speak to me.
- Introduce myself and explain my role.

The Consultation

The Families Federations are collaborating on a spousal and partner employment programme funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. Their aim is to ensure that service spouses and partners are provided with clear and easy access to effective partner employment support. As part of this work they have commissioned me to consider how to ensure that Forces Families Jobs (FFJ) develops to meet the needs of beneficiaries in providing a clearer pathway and be as effective in offering support as possible in the future.

I will take notes during our discussion. All views will be attributed and may be shared with the Families Federations collectively unless you expressly tell me otherwise. I would also like to record the session so I can listen back to something if I'm not sure when writing up my notes. The recording will then be deleted and will not be shared. Is this ok?

I am registered with the Information Commissioners Office, and I have a Data Protection Policy if you would like me to send you a copy.

Any questions before we begin?

Section 1. The Stakeholder organisation. Understanding your organisation and the employment support you offer to military spouses and partners.

1. I'd like to start by understanding the employment support offered by your organisation to military spouses and partners. I can see from your website you offer.....
2. Is there anything you are planning to do differently in this area of support in the future that you are able to share with me? i.e. adding, stopping or changing any type of support.
3. Have you carried out – or commissioned - any research in this area that you are able to share with me? Are you aware of any research by others that you use in your decision-making processes?
4. Are you seeing any changes in need due to the impact of the Covid pandemic? Or the increasing cost-of-living challenge? If so, are you making changes to your services or support in response?

Section 2. The wider context. Understanding the wider context in the provision of existing employment support for partners and spouses.

1. We know from the evidence available that military spouses and partners face unique employment challenges caused by things like relocating. What do you believe the priorities should be in providing employment support to military spouses or partners?

2. Do you feel there is any duplication of employment support for this cohort? And if so, do you believe this is a positive or negative thing for beneficiaries i.e. more choice, or more confusion?
3. Are there any gaps in employment support for military partners and spouses that you feel need to be filled?
4. Do you feel all sub cohorts received sufficient appropriate support e.g. non-UK spouses and partners or bereaved spouses and partners?

Section 3. Forces Families Jobs. Understanding the views of the stakeholder on the FFJ platform and its employment support offer.

1. How familiar are you with the work of the FFJ?
2. What do you feel FFJ does well?
3. Any areas where you feel FFJ could improve?

Section 4. The Future

1. Any advice or suggestions for the future of FFJ e.g. where hosted, things it could do differently?
2. Would you be interested in considering a collaboration / further collaboration with FFJ in the future if the opportunity arises?

Closing

Any other points, thoughts, or questions that we have not covered?

Thank you again for your time today and close.

Annex D – External Stakeholder List

Final External Stakeholder list				
Stakeholder Organisation	Name	Role	F2F or V	Interview date
Charity Sector (including CICs and SEs)				
Forces Employment Charity	Chloe MacKay	Deputy Chief Executive	F	05-Oct
	Lee Johnston	Families Programme Coordinator		
Milspo Business Network	Jess Sands	Founder	V	04-Oct
X-Forces Enterprise	Martin Wing	Exec Chairman	V	12-Oct
Salute My Job	Andrew Jackson	Founder/CEO	F	20-Sep
RBLI Lifeworks	Steve Parrott	Head of Lifeworks	V	11-Sep
	Mandy Waters			
MCN	Carolyn Campbell-Baldwin	Marketing Lead	V	18-Sep
Recruit for Spouses	Ella Cartwright-Terry	Career Academy BDM	V	25-Sep
	Cerise Upham	Commercial Director		
Career Pursuit	Helen Massey	Founder	V	11-Sep
Supporting the Unsung Heroes	Sarah Walker	Founder	V	11-Sep
Cobseo Partners Employment Cluster	Chloe MacKay	Chair	Combined with interview above.	
Partner Employment Working Group	Sarah Walker	Chair		
Marama Alliance	Luisa Matatolu	Volunteer	V	26-Sep
	Kiara Valentine	Volunteer		
	Sereima Tawake	Volunteer and Founder		
MOD				
Career Transition Partnership	Lorraine Cadle	Director of Employment, FEC	Removed	
Career Transition Partnership (MOD)	Brig Kirsten Dagless	Hd of Talent, Skills, Learning and Dev	V	21-Sep
Defence Relationship Management	Nat Haynes	AD – Relationship Management	F	11-Oct
Families Team	Ian Thornton	AH Armed Forces Families Policy	V	18-Sep
	Felicity Robbins			
RAF	Air Cdre Alan Opie	ACOS Pers Del	V	12-Oct
Army	Lt Col Tony Franks	SO1 Personal Services	V	18-Sep
RN	Jo Gower	RN FPS Engagement & Comms	V	12-Oct
Army HiVE Lead	Nikki Peterson	Head Army HIVE	V	04-Oct
Naval HiVE Lead	Jo Gower	RN FPS Engagement & Comms		
RAF HiVE Lead	Nerys Bell	Head of RAF HIVE Service		
Trainers				
Barclays	Danielle Sandy	Military Talent Acquisition	V	22-Sep
Amazon	Emma Morgan	Program Manager - EMEA Global Military Program	V	04-Oct
Royal Artillery Centre for Personal Development	Rob Dawkins	BDM	V	28-Sep
Accountancy Learning	Victoria Longstaff	Apprentice & Employer Coordinator	No response	
Employers				
NHS (Step into Health)	Simeran Kaur	Senior Programme Officer	V	26-Sep
	Irene Cowling			
Centrica (1 x private sector)	Laura Blair	Hd of Prog (Centrica Pathway)	V	30-Aug
Marks & Spencer	Sadie Rowley		V	06-Sep
Compass	Sonia Murtagh		V	12-Oct
	Angela Lewis			
Other				
Manpower	Jonathon Taylor	Head of Digital, Manpower Group	V	17-Aug

Annex E – Document List

Published reports that relate to spousal employment from 2018 onwards:

- Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Reports:
 - [Armed Forces Covenant annual report 2022.](#)
 - [Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2021](#)
 - [MOD Covenant-Annual-Report-2020](#)
 - [MOD Covenant Annual Report 2019](#)
 - [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018](#)
- Families Continuous Attitude Survey Reports:
 - [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2023](#)
 - [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2022](#)
 - [Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey 2021](#)
 - [Tri-Service families Continuous Attitude Survey 2020](#)
 - [Tri-service families continuous attitude survey 2019](#)
 - [Tri Service Families CA Survey Main report 2018](#)
- UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022 - 2032:
 - [UK Armed Forces Families Strategy 2022-32](#)
 - [AF Families Plan 2022](#)
 - [Armed Forces Families Strategy one year on](#)
- A Decade of the Covenant: A review of delivery and impact of ten years of the Armed Forces Covenant. [A Decade of the Covenant Digital.pdf](#) FIMT, Dec 2022.
- Snapshot Employment [2022-snapshot-employment.pdf \(fimt-rc.org\)](#) Feb 2021.
- Living In Our Shoes: Understanding the Needs of UK Armed Forces Families [Living in our shoes full report](#) Report of a Review commissioned by MOD in Jun 2020.
- The Reproduction of the Gender Regime: the Military and Education as State Apparatuses Constraining the Military Wife Student [The reproduction of the gender regime: the military and education as state apparatuses constraining the military wife student: Gender and Education: Vol 33, No 3 \(tandfonline.com\)](#) Mel Macer and Charlotte Chadderton – Bath Spa University (May 2020). Published by Taylor & Francis online.
- Confident, valued and supported: Examining the benefits of employment support for Military spouses. Lauren R Godier-McBard, Nick Caddick, Matt Fossey (Veterans and families institute for Military Social Research, Anglia Ruskin University) Feb 2020. [Confident, valued and supported: Examining the benefits of employment support for military spouses: Military Psychology: Vol 32, No 3 \(tandfonline.com\)](#) Published by Taylor & Francis online.
- The RAF Family – Experiences from Around the World. [The-RAF-Family---experiences-from-around-the-world.pdf \(raf-ff.org.uk\)](#) RAF Families Federation, Jan 2020.

- Army Families' Concerns Jan – Jun 2019. [Families-Concerns-Jan-Jun-2019_FINAL_ONLINE.pdf \(aff.org.uk\)](#) Army Families Federation, Sep 2019.
- Military spouses transition too! A call to action to address Spouses' Military to Civilian Transition. [Military spouses transition too! A call to action to address spouses' military to civilian transition: Journal of Family Social Work: Vol 23, No 1 \(tandfonline.com\)](#) Mary Keeling, Elisa V. Borch, Sara Kintzle, Meredith Kleykamp, Heather Robertson, Aug 2019. Published by Taylor & Francis online.
- 'It's nice to just be you': The influence of the employment experiences of UK military spouses during accompanied postings on wellbeing. ['It's nice to just be you': The influence of the employment experiences of UK military spouses during accompanied postings on well-being \(sagepub.com\)](#) Rachael Gribble, Laura Goodwin, Sian Oram, and Nicola T Fear. Sage Journals, Apr 2019.
- Improving Delivery of the UK's Armed Forces Covenant: How can organisations more effectively implement the Armed Forces Covenant across the UK in support of everyone in the Armed Forces Community? [Improving delivery of armed forces covenant](#) FiMT, Nov 2018.
- Lifting the Lid on transition: The family experience and the support they need. [lifting lid transition families experience support they need.pdf](#) FiMT, Nov 2018.
- Self-Employment and the Armed Forces Community. [323058165.pdf \(core.ac.uk\)](#) Warwick Institute for Employment Research, QinetiQ, X-Forces, Nov 2018.
- Military spousal/partner employment: Identifying the barriers and Support Required. [Employment-Research-report-ONLINE-COPY.pdf](#) WIER, Aug 2018.
- Evaluation of the Ministry of Defence Spouse Employment Support trial. [evaluation-ministry-of-defence-spouse-employment-trial.pdf](#) FiMT, Jun 2018.
- Military Co-Working Network Report [MCN \(militarycoworking.uk\)](#) Survey conducted into the working lives and career aspirations of military partners in 2020.
- Understanding and supporting the financial stability of UK military families [Research Brief Financial-stability](#) and [Report Financial-stability-of-military-families](#) RAND, Jun 2023.
- Haythornthwaite Review of Armed Forces Incentivisation [Agency and agility: Incentivising people in a new era](#), Jun 2023.

Annex F - Points raised by stakeholders outside of the scope of this review

There were points made by stakeholders which fell outside the scope of this review. These were felt to be important by stakeholders and so have been captured here to note.

1. Employment overseas. Although employment overseas for spouses and partners accompanying the Service person is outside the scope of this review, a number of stakeholders expressed great concern about the challenges this presents around spousal employment. It is understood that work is underway in this area, and hopefully this – along with the dedicated efforts of the three Families Federations – will help alleviate some of these issues.
2. Childcare. The provision and cost of childcare have been identified as very significant barriers for the spouses of serving personnel seeking employment. Childcare was not a subject explored during this review given work taking place elsewhere, and the difficulty in acquiring meaningful information through a survey on this subject. Stakeholders consistently felt this remains a significant barrier to securing desired employment.
3. Employment support for dependent children around 16-18 years old, and more employment support for 18-25year olds. It was suggested that more could be developed for dependent children and adult children through FFJ e.g. signposting to apprenticeships offered by the Armed Forces and associated industries, university scholarships etc.
4. It was suggested that the Office for Veterans Affairs (OVA) should also include veterans' spouses and partners in their remit to increase the focus on spouses and partners in this cohort.