

Key Facts & Opportunities

13,500+

employers have signed the Armed Forces Covenant

30

new signatories join weekly

140,000

cadets and 30,000 adult volunteers benefit from UK Cadet Force

95%

of personnel receive apprenticeships during training

3,173

early Service Leavers in 2023-24

64%

of service leavers cite family impact as reason for leaving

35%

of military spouses with degrees earn below £20k; 46% face interview bias

Reservists contribute

~20,000

duty-days/month to UK Defence

Call to Action

- 1 Sign or strengthen your Armed Forces Covenant commitments.
- 2 Progress through the Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS).
- 3 Adopt best practice for supporting Reservists, Service Spouses, Cadet Volunteers, and Service Leavers through the transformative power of earn and learn schemes.
- 4 Share your story and help shape future employer-Defence collaboration.

The Armed Forces Special Interest Group is supported by The 5% Club Patron Members:



Foreword

The 5% Club was founded on a simple principle: that employers have the power to transform lives through skills development, opportunity and purposeful employment. Nowhere is that principle more important than in our Members support for the Armed Forces Community - those who serve, have served, and the families who stand behind them.



Today's Parliamentary launch of The 5% Club Armed Forces Special Interest Group marks a significant step in strengthening that commitment. This Group brings together employers, policymakers and Defence leaders to champion practical, evidence-based solutions that help the Armed Forces Community thrive in civilian workplaces. From cadets developing confidence and aspiration, to early service leavers ready to apply their newly acquired skills, to reservists who balance civilian and military careers, to the spouses and partners whose resilience underpins retention - each represents extraordinary talent.

More than 13,500 organisations have now signed the Armed Forces Covenant, with dozens joining every week. Employers are already demonstrating real leadership: offering flexible policies for reservists, supporting cadet volunteers, creating portable roles for spouses, and introducing structured pathways for service leavers. Through this Special Interest Group, we will showcase that leadership, highlight best practice in skills development, and support employers to build cultures where the Armed Forces Community are recognised, valued and their contributions across the UK enhanced through the transformative power of workplace learning.

As we gather in Parliament to launch this group, I invite you to join us in shaping a stronger, fairer and more inclusive national workforce - one that matches opportunity with the extraordinary potential of those who serve.

Mark Cameron OBE
Chief Executive Officer
The 5% Club



The Employer Gateway to Defence

Overview

Defence Relationship Management (DRM) is the central gateway for employers who want to support the UK Armed Forces community. DRM oversees the Armed Forces Covenant and Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), two powerful mechanisms that encourage employers to adopt fair and inclusive practices.

With more than **13,500 Covenant signatories** and **30 new employers joining weekly**, the UK now has one of the world's largest employer-led support networks for military communities. DRM enables businesses to understand Defence needs and to align their talent strategies accordingly - bridging skills gaps, supporting retention, and growing national resilience.

Why DRM Matters

- **Strengthens national resilience:** Employers working with Defence actively contribute to the security and stability of the UK.
- **Accesses exceptional talent:** The Armed Forces Community bring leadership, agility, values-driven behaviour, and specialist skills that enhance organisational performance.
- **Creates a consistent national standard:** The Covenant provides clear expectations for employers across regions and sectors.
- **Supports Defence capability:** Flexible working, fair treatment, and recognition of service ensure The Armed Forces Community can commit fully in both uniform and civilian roles.
- **Helps shape future Defence-industry collaboration:** DRM enables employers to influence new schemes such as Zigzag Careers and the Defence Skills Passport.

Employer Actions

- Sign the Covenant and adopt meaningful, measurable pledges.
- Progress through ERS Bronze, Silver and Gold by embedding durable policy changes.
- Provide supportive frameworks for reservists, cadet volunteers, spouses and service leavers.
- Engage in MOD talent initiatives such as the **Skills Passport** and **Zigzag Careers**, enabling talent flow between Defence and industry.
- Participate in roundtables and SIG working groups to shape future national workforce policy.

“Stonbury’s Armed Forces Network connects reservists, veterans, and families through mentoring, policy advocacy, and recruitment support. Combined with its BuildForce partnership, the initiative strengthens talent pipelines while embedding lived military experience into workforce strategy and inclusion practice.”

Stonbury Ltd - Armed Forces Employee Network



ERS Gold Employer - Integrated Defence Talent Strategy

A UK engineering company designed a Defence-friendly workforce strategy that aligned reservist training with leadership development, created portable roles for military spouses, and partnered with CTP to recruit service leavers into technical apprenticeships.

The result: stronger retention, broader diversity of thought, and improved operational resilience.

Cadets: Building The Future Workforce

Overview

The UK Cadet Forces are one of the most effective youth development organisations in the country, delivering structured learning, leadership, teamwork, and confidence to **140,000 young people** supported by **30,000 adult volunteers**.

Cadet programmes develop critical life skills - resilience, communication, initiative - that employers consistently seek. Importantly, **90% of cadets do not join the Armed Forces**, meaning the majority of this talent flows directly into civilian employment.

The Strategic Defence Review aims for **30% growth in cadet participation by 2030**, requiring increased support for volunteers and stronger engagement with employers. The Cadet Forces need industry partnerships to unlock STEM exposure, widen access, and help build the nation's future talent pipeline.

Why Cadets Matter to Employers

- They provide a diverse pipeline of confident, motivated and work-ready young people.
- Cadet Force Adult Volunteers (CFAVs) bring enhanced leadership, safeguarding, mentoring, and risk-management skills to their workplaces.
- Cadet participation strongly correlates with **improved social mobility**, broadening access to opportunity.
- Employers can positively influence community impact, talent development, and early skills attainment.
- Industry partnerships enrich cadet experiences and help shape future workforce capability.

Employer Actions

- Offer flexible working arrangements for Cadet Force Adult Volunteers.
- Provide enrichment such as hackathons, engineering workshops, digital learning sessions, or workplace shadowing.
- Support local cadet units with facilities, sponsorship, or mentoring schemes.
- Join the national cadet-industry engagement pathway to strengthen early talent pipelines.
- Integrate cadet participation into CSR and ESG frameworks to demonstrate social impact.

“Through Armed Forces SIG leadership and its Military Talent Programme, Balfour Beatty is creating structured pathways for cadets, service leavers, and young Armed Forces affiliates to access training and careers, supporting early talent development across the infrastructure sector.”

Balfour Beatty - Early Talent & Cadet Pathways focus



A UK infrastructure firm introduced a Volunteer Support Scheme providing up to 5 days of paid leave for cadet activities, plus annual leadership recognition awards. Volunteer retention increased, and the firm reported improved management capability among participating staff.

Service Spouses & Families: Unlocking Hidden Talent

Overview

Service families are the backbone of Defence capability. Their stability, adaptability, and support directly influence serving personnel's motivation and retention. Yet **64% of service personnel cite family impact as a reason for leaving the Armed Forces.**

Spouses and partners offer some of the most adaptable, multi-skilled, and motivated talent available - but face persistent structural barriers including discriminatory hiring practices, disrupted career pathways, and employment restrictions during overseas postings.

Military spouses frequently hold strong professional qualifications and bring unique strengths: resilience, independence, fast learning, and problem-solving, often referred to collectively as a "Swiss Army knife" skillset. Yet many are under-employed, with **35% of degree holders earning below £20,000**, and **46% reporting interview discrimination.** Childcare remains a critical barrier to participation.

There is a major opportunity for employers to tap into this under-utilised workforce.

Why Families Matter to Employers

- Supporting spouses boosts **Defence retention**, contributing directly to national resilience.
- Spouses bring versatile, transferable skills developed across relocations and diverse employment contexts.
- Employers who offer portable roles gain loyal, high-performing employees.

- Spouse-friendly policies contribute to diversity, equality, inclusion and talent-scarcity strategies.
- Strong employer support enhances organisational reputation and ERS standing.

Employer Actions

- Introduce mobile, flexible roles that remain viable during relocations.
- Create dedicated spouse recruitment pathways and guaranteed-interview schemes.
- Provide flexible or predictable working hours that align with childcare realities.
- Ensure hiring practices are bias-free and do not penalise military lifestyle.
- Embed spouse support in Covenant pledges and ERS submission evidence.

"GMI supports the Steel Soldiers campaign, displaying commemorative silhouettes and raising funds for the Army Benevolent Fund. The initiative honours service, engages communities, and provides lifelong support to veterans and families, reinforcing Armed Forces recognition within company culture."

GMI Construction Group - Steel Soldiers Campaign



A financial services provider redesigned specific roles to be fully portable, enabling spouses to continue careers across postings. Over two years, spouse employment retention increased by 34%, and employee engagement rose measurably.

Early Service Leavers: An Untapped Talent Pool

Overview

Early Service Leavers (ESLs) represent a unique and under-recognised opportunity for UK employers. In 2023-24, **3,173 ESLs** left the Armed Forces. Most are in their early twenties, with high levels of maturity, discipline, leadership, and technical skill.

Many have already managed complex tasks, worked internationally, or led teams, often under pressure and with limited supervision.

The Armed Forces remain one of the UK's largest providers of apprenticeships: **85% of personnel complete an apprenticeship as part of their training**, giving ESLs strong qualifications and practical experience.

ESLs represent a high-potential workforce whose development curve is steep and whose values-driven behaviours enrich civilian organisations.

Why ESLs Matter to Employers

- They bring technical skills and leadership maturity far beyond typical early-career candidates.
- They are highly motivated to learn and progress rapidly.
- They demonstrate adaptability and thrive in dynamic, high-pressure environments.
- Employers who engage ESLs early benefit from long-term retention and internal advancement.
- ESL success strengthens the Defence-employer talent ecosystem and enhances societal stability.

Employer Actions

- Introduce tailored early-career entry routes specifically for ESLs.
- Provide guaranteed interviews or skills-recognition frameworks.
- Work with CTP and Future Horizons to design pipelines aligned with industry needs.
- Offer structured apprenticeships, progression pathways, mentorship, and clear career maps.
- Support military skills translation through the new Defence Skills Passport.

"Soldiers to Site' offers service leavers hands-on construction placements, multi-role exposure, and career coaching. Participants gain CV support, skills translation, and employment pathways. Each placement ends in a positive outcome, from job offers to further training guidance, creating accessible entry routes into industry."

Esh Construction - Soldiers to Site



A UK manufacturing firm created an "ESL Leadership Pathway" combining technical training with managerial development. After two years, 80% of ESL recruits had progressed to supervisory roles, driving productivity and team performance.

Reservists: Twice The Citizen

Overview

Reservists are essential to UK Defence capability. Across the Services, they deliver specialist skills, surge capacity, and operational support - contributing around **4,000 manpower days per month** to regular-force activity.

Maritime Reservists alone deploy globally to regions including Japan, the Philippines, the South China Sea and Eastern Europe. Their contribution ranges from cyber operations and intelligence to engineering, logistics, medical support and leadership roles.

Yet despite their value, many reservists still **hide their service from employers** for fear it will be viewed negatively. This inhibits career development and operational readiness - and it represents a missed opportunity for employers to harness a uniquely skilled workforce.

Why Reservists Matter to Employers

- They bring dual expertise: civilian specialism plus military leadership.
- They enhance organisational resilience, crisis readiness and team performance.
- They demonstrate exceptional commitment, discipline and time management.
- They support Defence by filling critical capability gaps in high-demand areas (cyber, AI, data science, autonomous systems).
- Employers who support reservists gain recognition and reputational advantage through ERS.

Employer Actions

- Publicly promote a positive stance on reservist service.
- Provide paid training leave and flexible working arrangements.
- Recognise reservist skills as part of performance and talent frameworks.
- Engage in Defence-industry talent partnerships for specialist skill development.
- Integrate reservist support into HR strategy, Covenant pledges and ERS accreditation.

“Kier’s Armed Forces Inclusion Network supports spouses facing career disruption from relocations. Through mentoring, flexible working advocacy, and internal redeployment, the network helps partners sustain and progress careers across postings. The initiative demonstrates how inclusive policy and peer support can retain resilient, highly skilled talent within the workforce.”

Kier Group - Armed Forces Inclusion Network



A technology and cybersecurity employer established a dedicated “Reservist Skills Exchange” programme, enabling employees to rotate into Defence training. Participants returned with enhanced analytical capabilities, leadership confidence, and cyber-readiness skills - benefiting both Defence and the company.

Join The Armed Forces Special Interest Group

Our Mission

To unite employers committed to supporting The Armed Forces Community - championing policies, pathways, opportunities and partnerships that help Defence communities thrive in civilian employment and strengthen national resilience.

What Employers Gain

- Direct access to Defence leaders and policy insight.
- Best practice toolkits and case studies across all The Armed Forces Community groups.
- Participation in themed working groups (Reservists, Families, Cadets, Early Service Leavers).
- Employer recognition through Covenant and ERS alignment.
- Opportunities to co-design new national initiatives including Zigzag Careers and the Defence Skills Passport.
- Peer learning, networking, and visibility as a Defence-supportive employer.

Our Offer

- Regular roundtables and forums convened by The 5% Club.
- Access to research, analysis and employer guidance.
- Co-development of early careers and mid-careers talent pathways.
- National employer showcases and recognition events.
- Ongoing collaboration with DRM, CTP and MOD People.

Call to Join

Become part of a national movement committed to supporting The Armed Forces Community and strengthening UK resilience. Join the AF SIG today to influence policy, build capability and share best practice with leading employers across the country.

Contact: contactus@5percentclub.org.uk

Web: www.5percentclub.org.uk



Cadets



"We are in the business of improving outcomes for young people ... and need to attract and retain them by ensuring the experience is as relevant and worthwhile as possible. This is where the wider employer community can help..."

Brigadier Anthony Lamb MBE DL VR, Ministry of Defence, Head of Youth & Cadets

Service Spouses



"Service families are fundamental to Defence capability. When families are supported, serving personnel can continue to serve. Spouses also represent a highly capable but often under-utilised talent pool."

Nick Pett, Ministry of Defence, Deputy Director, Armed Forces People Policy Projects

Reserves



"I'm delighted for the Maritime Reserve to support this exciting initiative..We greatly value the already strong relationship we enjoy with the employers of our Maritime Reservists, up and down the country, and this will only strengthen that partnership"

Commodore Jo Adey ADC Royal Navy, Commander Maritime Reserves

The Employer Gateway To Defence

"Supporting the Armed Forces community helps organisations with recruitment and retention ... If you haven't signed the Covenant, I'd encourage you to look into it"

Adam Keane, Chief of Staff, Defence Relationship Management

Early Service Leavers

"Service Leavers have already operated in complex, high-pressure environments..... holding real responsibility, often in challenging operational settings. We need to work with employers to create understanding of the value they bring, and the skills they carry into civilian employment"

Squadron Leader David Bailey Royal Air Force, Ministry of Defence, Resettlement Policy Lead

"QinetiQ's paid spouse placements, delivered with Recruit for Spouses, provide flexible work experience, coaching, and mentoring. Designed around childcare and mobility realities, the programme rebuilds confidence and employability. By combining real workplace exposure with structured support, QinetiQ is creating sustainable pathways back into skilled employment."

QinetiQ - Military Spouse Work Placements

QINETIQ

"The Open University delivers flexible learning for military spouses through free employability courses, alongside fully funded scholarships for disabled veterans. By removing financial and geographic barriers to education, these programmes enable career progression, retraining, and long-term employment, demonstrating education's vital role in Armed Forces community mobility."

The Open University - Learning & Scholarship Support



"Rose Builders recruits veterans through Building Heroes, providing trade training, apprenticeships, and long-term progression. Graduates bring teamwork, resilience, and leadership to site roles. The partnership creates a reliable talent pipeline while supporting meaningful career transition into skilled construction employment."

Rose Builders - Building Heroes Partnership

ROSE

"QA's Military Veteran Technology Academy reskills service leavers into AI, software, data, and cloud careers. Combining technical training with employability coaching, the programme prepares veterans for mission-critical digital roles, bridging defence talent into the technology workforce."

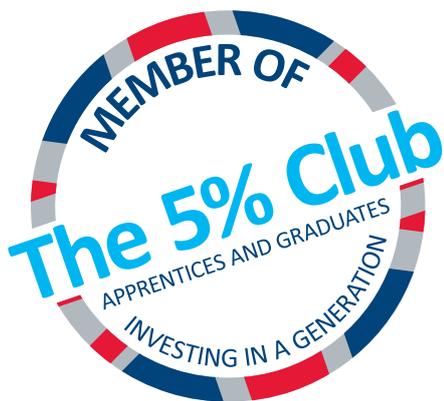
QA Ltd - Military Veteran Technology Academy



"Balfour Beatty leads sector collaboration through The 5% Club Armed Forces Special Interest Group. Linking reservists and wider Armed Forces talent to earn-and-learn pathways, the initiative aligns skills development with employment opportunity while strengthening employer best practice and workforce resilience."

Balfour Beatty - Armed Forces SIG Leadership (Reservists focus)

Balfour Beatty



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