



Understanding the journey to and through 'Access to Higher Education Diplomas' for adults with a Service background

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This research report is the second in our series of occasional papers from the Bath Spa Institute for Education.

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Foreword



BY AIR VICE - MARSHAL RAY LOCK, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, FORCES IN MIND TRUST

A key finding of many of the studies we have conducted in our short history so far, has been that the breadth and depth of services available to those who are about to leave, or who have already left the Armed Forces, and their families, have actually been quite significant. Often though, for whatever reason, those who are entitled to such services, and indeed those who would gain the most benefit, simply do not get hold of them. It was certainly a key finding of Lord Ashcroft's 2014 Veterans' Transition Review, in which he found that *"a great deal of high-quality provision is in place to assist with transition, within the Services and through central government, local authorities, the Third Sector, business and elsewhere"*. So a question Forces in Mind Trust always sets out to answer is: *'What is it that is preventing those with a need accessing that which is available?'*

The resonance of our approach with the subject of this report on Access to Higher Education Diplomas is hopefully obvious. Employment is one of the most important factors leading to successful transition from military to civilian lives: it enables economic well-being, which in turn contributes to personal health and well-being, housing and positive relationships. These are all key outcomes that our change model suggests lead to successful and sustainable transition, and they apply as equally to the Service leaver as to the spouse. The role of education in gaining satisfying, rewarding employment is likewise a crucial one, and whilst the Services already do invest a considerable amount in learning, inevitably there will be gaps at transition relating to a lack of direct transferability, or simply not having had the opportunity to fulfil an individual's learning potential.

Both these aspects can, in part, be tackled through Access courses. And as this report makes clear, improving the take-up of such courses is more about information than it is about delivery. Even implementing the whole of the long list of recommendations in this report would frankly

cost very little. What is needed is an acceptance that much more should be done to inform and to promote – both the educators, and those for whom such education is entirely within their grasp.

In my time as Commandant of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, it was my privilege to engage in the education of some of the most talented members of the Armed Forces. Regardless of their background, not a single person failed to leave the College better equipped to deal with their future, either in service or out; and not a single person failed to unlock a potential they had hitherto left untouched, through lack of opportunity, or through lack of knowledge. How much more could be achieved then for those Service leavers and their spouses who before and throughout their military lives were unable to access higher education? It really is a simple problem to solve – the solutions are neither complex, nor are they costly. I therefore lay down a challenge to everyone involved in Access to Higher Education Diplomas: identify what you can do to improve the take up, and then (Nike, please don't sue), just do it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Lock". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned at the end of the text block.

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Glossary



Access Co-ordinator: The Access Co-ordinator is appointed by the Access to HE Diploma provider and is responsible for ensuring adherence to the regional Access Validating Agency and Quality Assurance Agency regulations, policies and guidelines, Access to HE Tutor guidance, maintaining links with Higher Education Institutions and other bodies associated with adult learners and ensuring the accuracy of promotional material and the provider's website.

Access to Higher Education Diploma (AHED)

Sector: The use of the term 'AHED Sector' refers to those organisations involved in the regulation, promotion, AHED-related Information, Advice and Guidance provision and delivery of AHED courses and includes the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Access Validating Agencies, Further Education Institutions (FEIs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Access Validating Agency (AVA): AVAs are licensed by the QAA to develop, approve and monitor AHED courses and work with FEIs and other AHED providers.

Armed Forces Covenant: The Armed Forces Covenant sets out the relationship between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. It recognises the nation's moral obligation to members of the Armed Forces and their families. Its two principles are that: i) the Armed Forces Community should not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services; and ii) special consideration is appropriate in some cases.

Ascentis: Ascentis is the Access Validating Agency for the South West Region after its acquisition of

AptEd in November 2015. This research project originated with support from AptEd. More information at: www.ascentis.co.uk.

Career Information, Advice and Guidance

(C-IAG): For the purpose of this research, the use of the term C-IAG is used to describe a range of provision to clients; from providing information or signposting to information, to facilitating access to knowledge that supports clients to make informed decisions about their career pathway.

Career Transition Partnership (CTP): The CTP is a partnering agreement between the MOD and Right Management Ltd, and provides resettlement services for those leaving the Navy, Marines, Army and RAF. More information at: www.ctp.org.uk.

Civilian-facing: The term 'Civilian-facing' (C-facing) is used to describe an organisation whose client/user base is civilian.

The Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo):

Cobseo represents the whole Serving and ex-Service community. It provides a single point of contact for external organisations seeking access to Cobseo's Service charities. It provides a searchable, online Members Directory. More information at: www.cobseo.org.uk.

Early Service Leaver (ESL): An ESL is someone leaving the Services after having served for less than 4 years. They are eligible to a much more limited resettlement support package than those who serve for over four years, provided through Career Transition Partnership's Future Horizons Programme.

Enhanced Learning Credits (ELCs): ELCs provide financial support from the MOD for eligible Serving

and ex-Service personnel to use for pursuit of higher level learning i.e. for courses that result in a nationally recognised qualification at Level three or above on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). They are available to use in Service and for up to 10 years after leaving Service.

Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Services (ELCAS): ELCAS is the administrative service for processing Enhanced Learning Credits and the Publicly- Funded FE/HE Scheme. More information at: www.enhancedlearningcredits.com.

Ex-Service personnel: In line with other recent reports [Forces in Mind Trust, 2013] the term 'ex-Service personnel' is used instead of 'veteran' as not all ex-Service personnel describe themselves as veterans [Burdett, et.al. 2012].

Further Education Institutions (FEI): FEIs are institutions, usually colleges, which provide post compulsory education study for courses below the level of a degree.

Help for Heroes (H4H): H4H is a national charity that exists to deliver a network of support for ex-Service personnel who have become wounded, injured or sick and to their families. One of the support strands provided is H4H Career Recovery that helps individuals to identify and achieve a new future outside of the Armed Forces. More information at: www.helpforheroes.org.uk.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): HEIs are institutions, usually universities, which provide undergraduate and postgraduate study options.

HIVES: HIVES are an information network, provided by the individual Services and are available to all members of that Service community. HIVE information centres support service communities through the provision of up-to-date and relevant information.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP): A LEP is a non-statutory partnership between the public sector (mainly local authorities) and the private sector. There are 39 LEPs across England and their aim is to promote economic growth and jobs in local areas.

Military-facing: The term 'Military-facing' (M-facing) is used to describe an organisation whose clients/users have a Service background.

National Careers Service (NCS): The NCS provides online and face-to-face Career Information, Advice and Guidance support across England to young people and adults. More information at: www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF): The NQF is the framework used in England and Wales by education and employment to help compare the size, level of difficulty and content of different qualifications.

Personnel Recovery Centres: Personnel Recovery Centres form a major part of the MOD-led Defence Recovery Capability. The initiative is delivered in partnership with Service charities and organisations and is designed to assist Wounded, Injured and Sick Service personnel to recover and either return to duty or move successfully into civilian life.

Publicly-Funded FE/HE Scheme (PF FE/HE): The PF FE/HE Scheme provides eligible Service Leavers and ex-Service personnel who have served for more than 4 years and those who have been medically discharged with access to a first full Level three, or a first HE qualification free from tuition fees; it is also referred to in this report as the 'free degree scheme'.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA): The QAA licenses the Access Validating Agencies and provides the website resource www.accesstohe.ac.uk.

Resettlement: The use of the term 'resettlement', in this report, refers to the formal support process provided through the MOD, to Service Leavers during their transition. The extent of this resettlement support is graduated and depends on either length of Service or mode of discharge. Resettlement is delivered through three levels: First Line at Unit level, where resettlement information Officers provide information about what support a Service Leaver is eligible to receive; Second Line, when a mandatory resettlement interview is provided by the individual Services at regional level and Third Line resettlement, a tri-Service support package provided by CTP.

The Forces Employment Charity (RFEA): The RFEA is a Service charity. Its Compass Employment Programme addresses the employment support needs of ex-Forces personnel who no longer qualify for CTP resettlement provision; providing continued employment support, regardless of length of time Served in the Armed Forces. More information at: www.rfea.org.uk.

Service: The term 'Service' is used predominantly throughout the report to refer to the Armed Forces but is used interchangeably with the terms 'Military' and 'Forces'.

Service background: Refers to any adult who has a current or past affiliation to a Service either as Serving personnel, spouse or dependant adult child.

Service Leaver (SL): The term SL is used in this report to refer to those in their official resettlement period; this can start up to two years before discharge and extend for up to two years post discharge.

Serving background: Refers specifically to an adult who is currently serving or has previously served.

Spouse: The term 'spouse' is used throughout this report to include the non-Serving partner who is either legally married or cohabiting with their partner, who has a Serving background.

Transition: 'Transition' is used to describe the journey experienced by Service Leavers and their families who are reintegrating into a civilian life after a period in the Armed Forces; with respect to Service Leavers, it includes the period from which their official resettlement support starts.

Tri-Service: Tri-Service refers to the three Armed Forces – the Army, RAF and Navy. The Marines are the amphibious troops of the Navy.

Universities in Support of Wounded Injured and Sick (UNSWIS): A network of universities across the UK that provide short unpaid work placements, taster visits, open days and education and training advice for Wounded, Injured and Sick (WIS) personnel assisting them in their transition to civilian employment. More information at: www.civvystreet.org/Employment/UniversitiesinSupportofWounded,InjuredandSick

Wounded Injured and Sick (WIS): The term 'WIS' is used in this report to refer to those Serving personnel who have been wounded injured or sick, as a result of their Service.

Executive Summary



The Access to Higher Education Diploma (AHED) is a well-established course, delivered in the main locally through Further Education Institutions; it provides a non-traditional route into Higher Education (HE) for those aged 19 years and over who have few, if any, qualifications to gain entry to HE.

Although transition is a smooth journey for many Service Leavers (SLs) and their families, there are a significant number who need support to improve their transition experience, to minimise the risk of unfulfilling careers within the civilian sector.

Eligible SLs who have served for at least four years and those who are medically discharged can apply to undertake a free degree after leaving Service, through the Publicly-funded FE/HE Scheme. There appears to be a good opportunity for the AHED to widen the market for this free degree scheme to those SLs without A-levels.

This tri-Service research project set out to understand the journey to and through the AHED for those adults with a current or past affiliation to one of the Services, either as Serving personnel, spouse or dependant adult child.

Service spouses can also be vulnerable to finding themselves unemployed or under-employed when they transition back into the civilian sector, often due to their highly mobile Service lives and the problems that many face finding affordable, quality childcare; a necessity for many Service spouses who find themselves living for extended periods as lone parents when their Serving partners are away on military commitments.

With evidence indicating that those SLs whose spouses are employed face better prospects for a successful transition than those whose spouses are unemployed, the case for supporting civilian careers for both SLs and their spouses is strong.

The questions that this research set out to answer emerged from queries raised by the project's partner Access Validating Agency, Ascentis, which serves a region containing 25% of Britain's Armed Forces and faced persistent anecdotal evidence that their region was experiencing a decline in the number of AHED students with a Service background.

This research aims to: provide a better level of understanding of the issues that adults with a Service background can face on their journey to and through an Access to Higher Education Diploma; show how these issues can manifest as barriers on these journeys; and develop recommendations that identify opportunities to address these barriers.

Section 1 provides background information on: the AHED; the resettlement support available to Service Leavers seeking a career within the civilian sector; and the impact of a lack of suitable qualifications, for both Service Leavers and their spouses, on the transition experience of Service families.

Section 2 describes the research methodology. It sets out the project's aims and approach and describes the methods employed for data generation and analysis. The limitations of the research are also reported.

Section 3 reports the research findings under the three key sections: (i) Profile of AHED students with a Service background; (ii) Factors impacting on

knowledge of the AHED; and (iii) Factors impacting on engagement with the AHED. Within each of these sections, insights from the data are reported.

Section 4 provides the conclusion to the research insights and describes opportunities to facilitate improved journeys to and through AHED for adults with a Service background. This section includes the project's recommendations that are linked to issues that have been identified as impacting on:

Knowledge of AHED, specifically related to:

- Access to adult career information, advice and guidance;
- Promotion of AHED; and
- Provision of informed AHED-related information, advice and guidance.

Engagement with AHED, specifically related to:

- Opportunities for personal education during Service;
- Study format of AHED courses;
- Funding for AHED and degree course fees;
- Living costs for AHED study;
- Currency of military qualifications;
- GCSE requirements for Higher Education;
- Relocation within Service;
- Learning support at Further Education Institutes;
- Childcare; and
- Transition experiences.

Section 5 summarises the research recommendations under individual sector and organisation headings, as possible means of improving the journey to and through AHED for adults with a Service background.

The research recommendations are offered to inform Civilian-facing and Military-facing stakeholder decisions. They are intended to reduce the risk of AHED students being disadvantaged by their Service background, so contributing to more successful transitions for those seeking fulfilling civilian careers through the AHED route.

1. Introduction



1.1 ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMAS

The 'Access to Higher Education Diploma' (AHED) is a well-established qualification, delivered in England and Wales, mainly by Further Education Institutes (FEIs) that provides a non-traditional route into Higher Education (HE). The course prepares students, aged 19 years and over, for study at degree level and addresses the particular needs of those who, for a variety of reasons, including joining the Service after leaving education at 16, or having experienced a disrupted education, have few, if any, qualifications suitable to gain entry to HE.

The AHED plays an important role in widening participation in HE for disadvantaged groups, helping individuals to fulfil their aspirations. In 2014/15, over 23,000 AHED students entered a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in England and Wales; 22% coming from low participation areas [QAA, 2015]. Not only is the AHED widely recognised by UK HEIs but many also actively encourage applications from AHED students.

There are more than 1,100 courses available in a wide range of different subjects, from business to nursing. Although most AHED courses can be completed in one year, some are delivered as part-time courses over two or more years, through distance learning or evening sessions.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) regulates AHED and the Access Validating Agencies (AVA), which operate across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, have responsibility for the planning, monitoring and development of AHED provision in their region. A separate system for Access courses

operates in Scotland, through the Scottish Wider Access Programme.

Ascentis, the AVA that operates in a region that hosts about 25% of Britain's Armed Forces, identified anecdotally from Access Co-ordinators across its region, that the number of AHED students with a Service background appeared to be in decline on their courses [Ascentis, 2013]. However, there was no formal corroboration of such a trend because AHED students with a Service background have not been identified as a specific category in the 'End of Year Reviews' on AHED student data, submitted by AHED providers to their regional AVA.

In its efforts to identify opportunities to improve the recruitment of AHED students with a Service background, Ascentis found that there appeared to be a lack of knowledge amongst the AHED sector with regard to how they could best engage with military sector professionals who deliver career and adult education Information, Advice and Guidance (C-IAG) to Service Leavers (SLs) and their adult family members. This led the AVA to question whether there are factors at play that can present as barriers to adults with a Service background; specifically, factors that impact negatively on knowledge of or engagement with AHED and, if there are any, how could and should they be best addressed by relevant stakeholders, to support those adults with a Service background who have no A-levels but who aspire to degree-dependent careers.

A recent report by the Office for Fair Access [OFFA, 2016] indicates that not only has the number of mature students entering HE halved over the past decade, but that almost a third of the targets relating to mature students have not been met by HEIs in 2014/15.

This has led to concerns that there are issues that need to be addressed, if the Government's targets for widening participation in HE are to be met by 2020.

"In order to strengthen the economy and ensure that higher education is truly open to everyone with the talent to benefit, urgent action must be taken to reverse the long-term decline in part-time and mature students."

Director of Fair Access to Higher Education [OFFA, 2016]

In responding to this report, the General Secretary of the University and College Union has called for a national inquiry to address the barriers to HE for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds [Ali, 2016].

1.2 TRANSITION FOR ADULTS WITH A SERVICE BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) provides transition support to its Service Leavers (SL) through a range of resettlement packages that are delivered at three key stages. The first line of resettlement, provided at Unit level by the individual Services, provides what is essentially a signposting function and introduces the SL to the 2nd Line of resettlement support. This 2nd line support is also delivered by each individual Service and involves the SL attending a mandatory interview with a 2nd Line resettlement Officer; this is where C-IAG can start and it provides access to the 3rd line resettlement, delivered through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). A SL's engagement with CTP, a tri-Service organisation, is voluntary.

The support available through CTP depends on time served, or mode of discharge. Those who have served for more than 6 years are eligible to receive a comprehensive package of support, including Career Information, Advice and Guidance (C-IAG) which can be available from up to two years pre-discharge to two years post-discharge. Service personnel who are medically discharged are also eligible to this

full resettlement support from CTP, regardless of their length of Service and those who are medically discharged and deemed to be more vulnerable are eligible to additional support through CTP-Assist. Personnel who have served for between 4-6 years are eligible to a more limited 'employment support package' through CTP, while those who have served for less than 4 years, the Early Service Leavers (ESLs), are eligible to receive a more virtual employment support package from the Future Horizons Programme, also provided through CTP. Ex-Service personnel, who have been medically discharged and no longer eligible for support from CTP, can receive ongoing career support from Help for Heroes' (H4H) Career Recovery Service.

While transition is a smooth process for many, for a significant number much more needs to be done to improve the transition journey. Unsuccessful transitions not only impact on Service families but, with ex-Service personnel forming 10% of the adult population in the UK [MOD, 2011], unsuccessful transitions can have significant implications for society as a whole [Forces in Mind Trust, 2013].

The Strategic Defence and Security Reviews in 2010 and 2015 have seen the overall size of the regular Armed Forces reduced through a series of redundancies. These redundancies have had the largest impact on Army personnel, who form the majority of SLs [ibid].

Those SLs who lack qualifications recognised by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) who have an aspiration for a fulfilling, post-military career, will likely find their transition journey more challenging.

Low standards of literacy and numeracy on entry to Service tends to be more of a problem for the Army than the Navy or the RAF because the Army recruits many young people from poor socio-economic backgrounds, with low levels of educational attainment, to the Infantry [Ashcroft, 2014; BIS, 2012].

It is not only SLs that have to experience the transition from a military to civilian life; for many Service families, particularly those who have lived for long periods on military bases and/or experienced frequent relocations, all family members will each have to navigate their own transition journey.

Service Leavers, whose spouses are employed within the civilian sector, have an increased chance of more successful transitions [Forces in Mind Trust, 2013]. However, Service spouses often face many barriers to employment and fulfilling careers, including frequent relocations, lack of childcare and poor qualifications and skills [The Centre for Social Justice, 2016].

This recent report by The Centre for Social Justice [ibid] identified a lack of suitable qualifications as a key factor preventing Army spouses from finding employment and progressing to fulfilling careers; and highlighted problems that Service spouses can face in their efforts to pursue adult education opportunities and how this impacts negatively on their future employment and career opportunities. Clearly, more needs to be done to promote and support the particular needs of Service spouses to address the barriers that many face to employment and adult education. This would, in turn, support more successful transitions for all members of the Service family.

The premise of this research is that AHED courses can contribute to successful transitions from military to civilian lives for some SLs and their families and that, through a better understanding of the experiences of these adults on their journeys to and through AHED, opportunities can be identified for both civilian and military stakeholders to improve these experiences and minimise any barriers that AHED students may face due to their Service background.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of issues that adults with a Service background can face on their journey to and through an AHED course and identify how these issues may manifest as barriers and what could be done to improve the journey.

Specifically, this research aims to produce evidenced-based recommendations for Civilian-facing (C-facing) and Military-facing (M-facing) organisations to consider, enabling them to:

- Improve their provision of AHED-related Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) to adults with a Service background; and
- Prevent anyone from being disadvantaged in their knowledge of and engagement with AHED by their Service background.

It is hoped that this project will make a contribution to more successful transitions for those SLs, spouses and dependant adult children who aspire to fulfilling careers that require a degree but whom, for a variety of reasons, lack the traditional qualifications necessary to start that journey.

1.4 OUT OF SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH

There are two particular areas that are out of the scope of this research. This project has not looked at the particular issues that affect adults with a Commonwealth background, nor has it sought to illuminate any specific issues that affect those who left Service before the introduction, in 2005, of the resettlement arrangements provided through the MOD's contract with CTP.

2. Methodology



2.1 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of the study was to develop a set of recommendations to facilitate improved journeys to and through AHED courses for students with a Service background, by:

- Illuminating the level of knowledge and understanding both in and between M-facing and C-facing organisations that deliver Career Information, Advice and Guidance (C-IAG), that informs AHED-related IAG to those with a Service background;
- Identifying factors that can present as barriers to knowledge of and engagement with AHED for adults with a Service background; and
- Profiling a regional cohort of AHED students with a Service background, over a two-year period.

This research sets out to address four research questions:

1. What is the profile of AHED students with a Service background?
2. How does a Service background impact on knowledge of AHED?
3. How does a Service background impact on engagement with AHED?
4. How can the military and civilian sectors improve the journey to and through AHED for students with a Service background?

2.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

A mixed methods approach was employed in this research. This enabled quantitative data to be generated through the use of annual data returns and an online survey; and qualitative data to be generated through a series of interviews, workshops and e-consultations.

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from Bath Spa University's School of Education Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee.

2.3 RESEARCH STAGES

This research included the following eight stages:

STAGE	RESEARCH ACTIVITY	RESEARCH OUTCOME, TO:
1	Additional question in the AVA's annual data returns for 2013/14 and 2014/15	Profile AHED students with a Service background in the S.W. region, over a two-year period.
2	Survey of Access Co-ordinators from across the S.W. region	PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THEIR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Knowledge of, promotion to and/or engagement with military communities; ■ Knowledge about resettlement support to SLs; and ■ AHED course delivery formats.
3	Interviews with Access Co-ordinators from the S.W. region	PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO THEIR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Promotion of AHED to civilians; ■ Promotion of AHED to adults with a Service background; ■ Knowledge of the military resettlement and adult education sector; and ■ Knowledge about potential barriers on the journey to and engagement with AHED, for adults with a Service background.
4	Workshop with Access Co-ordinators from the S.W. region	PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Opportunities for promoting AHED to adults with a Serving background; and ■ Knowledge about potential barriers on the journey to and engagement with AHED, for adults with a Service background.
5	Interviews with C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals from the S.W. region	PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provision of AHED-related IAG to civilians and adults with a Service background; ■ M-facing providers' interaction and/or collaboration with the AHED sector; ■ C-facing providers': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge and understanding of military resettlement support available to SLs; and - Interaction/collaboration with M-facing C-IAG providers; and ■ Potential barriers on the journey to and engagement with AHED, for adults with a Service background.
6	Feedback workshops with C-facing and M-facing stakeholders from the S.W. region.	Identify actions that M-facing and C-facing sectors should consider, to improve their support for the journey to and through AHED, for adults with a Service background.
7	Interviews with past, current and potential AHED students, with a Service background, from across England.	PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Journeys to AHED; ■ Journeys through AHED; and ■ Engagement with HE.
8	Consultation on draft recommendations.	Inform the research's final recommendations.

2.4 DATA GENERATION

Profiling of Access to Higher Education Diploma students with a Service background in the South West Region.

Access to Higher Education Diploma (AHED) providers are required by their Access Validating Agencies (AVA) to provide an annual, 'End of Year Programme Review' with detailed analysis of the courses they provide. This data is used by AVAs to inform their ongoing management, support, development and quality assurance procedures for their AHED courses and forms part of an AVA's own annual self-assessment report to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Profile data on AHED students with a Service background does not form part of these reviews. However, for the purpose of this research, additional questions were included in the participating AVA's 'End of Year Reviews' for the academic years 2013/14 and 2014/15 [Appendix 1], designed to generate data on the number and specific Service-related profile of AHED students. As these additional questions did not form part of the official agreement between the AHED providers and their AVA, the AHED providers were invited, not mandated, to provide this additional data.

Survey of Access Co-ordinators

An online survey was designed [Appendix 2] using Survey Monkey and sent to all 51 Access Co-ordinators within the S.W. region, covered by the single, participating AVA; this represented 27 Further Education Institutions (FEI).

The survey sought to gain data from Access Co-ordinators regarding their:

- Knowledge of, promotion to and level of engagement with local military communities;
- Knowledge of the military resettlement support available to Service Leavers; and
- Range of provision of AHED course delivery formats.

Interviews with Access Co-ordinators

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, face-to-face, with three Access Co-ordinators, each from an FEI with a local recruitment area that included either an RAF base, an Army base or a Navy base. Semi-structured interviews used specific prompts [Appendix 3] to provide a focus for the interviews whilst allowing flexibility to further explore points raised by interviewees. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights into the Access Co-ordinators':

- Knowledge of local, C-facing Adult C-IAG provision;
- Engagement with local, C-facing Adult C-IAG providers;
- Promotion of AHED to local civilians;
- Knowledge of local military community;
- AHED student cohort with a Service background;
- Knowledge of the military's resettlement support to SL education;
- Engagement with M-facing providers of C-IAG;
- Promotion and/or marketing of AHED to adults with a Service background; and
- Knowledge about particular issues that can impact negatively on AHED students with a Service background.

These semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded, with informed consent from interviewees, and transcribed in full.

Workshop with Access Co-ordinators

A workshop was conducted at an AVA regional training event for 24 Access Co-ordinators from FEIs across the S.W. region.

Workshop participants worked in groups of 3 to 5 participants. Each group discussed: i) How they do or could promote and market their AHED courses to adults with a Service background; and ii) Any issues that they are aware their students had faced, either on their journey to AHED course or during their experience as an AHED student, that could be directly

attributed to their Service background.

The purpose of this workshop was to provide an overview of:

- Opportunities for promoting AHED to adults with a Serving background; and
- Knowledge about potential barriers on journey to and engagement with AHED, for adults with a Service background.

The points that arose from each group were summarised and collated.

Interviews with Career Information, Advice and Guidance (C-IAG) professionals

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, face-to-face, with 30 C-facing and M-facing professionals with C-IAG, either wholly or partly, within their remit. Interviewees were invited from three geographical locations across the South West; each location included either an Army base, a Navy base or an RAF base. Specific interview prompts were used [Appendix 4] to provide a focus for these interviews whilst allowing flexibility to further explore points raised by interviewees.

The profile of these interviewees is provided in Appendix 5.

The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights into:

- Who is eligible to use their service;
- What element of C-IAG they offer to their clients;
- For M-facing C-IAG providers, their:
 - Knowledge and understanding of AHED;
 - Level of interaction and/or collaboration with:
 - C-facing C-IAG providers
 - Access Co-ordinators
 - The Higher Education (HE) sector;

- For C-facing C-IAG providers, their:
 - Knowledge and understanding of military resettlement support available to SLs;
 - Level of interaction and/or collaboration with M-facing C-IAG providers;
- Provision of AHED-related IAG; and
- Issues that they are aware had impacted on the journey to and through AHED for adults with a Service background.

These semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded, with informed consent from interviewees, and transcribed in full.

Feedback workshop with C-IAG and AHED sector professionals

M-facing and C-facing C-IAG professionals and AHED Co-ordinators, who had been interviewed as part of the project, were invited to participate further, in one of two workshops; one conducted within a project location that included an Army base and the other in a location with a Navy base. Additionally, invitations were extended to those members of the project steering group who had a C-IAG-related role within their organisation. Time constraints on participant availability prevented a similar workshop from being delivered in a location with an RAF base.

The profile of these workshop participants is provided in Appendix 6.

Workshop participants discussed the data generated from the interviews with C-IAG professionals and Access Co-ordinators, within military-civilian workshop groupings, with a focus on proposing informed-actions for both M-facing and C-facing sectors to consider, to improve the journey to and through AHED, for adults with a Service background. These proposed actions were recorded in writing by each group. Proposed actions from both workshops were then collated, to inform the research's draft recommendations.

Interviews with past, current and potential AHED students

Interviews were conducted with 12 past AHED students, 20 current AHED students and 7 adults who had identified themselves as 'potential' AHED students i.e. they were either considering an AHED course or they had previously considered an AHED course but had not progressed down the AHED route.

Initially, the project had aimed to recruit interviewees from within the S.W. region, through collaboration with the regional AVA, AHED Co-ordinators and Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Admissions Teams. However, a low recruitment rate led to a decision by the steering group to expand this recruitment stage across England. This was achieved by further promoting the request for interviewees [Appendix 7], through the support of the QAA and their network of AVAs across England; through the Confederation of Service Charities' (Cobseo's) network of Service Charities; advertisements in each of the three Service Family Federation magazines, Quest magazine and Questonline and by promotion through Help for Heroes (H4H) Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters networks. Interviewees recruited to the study were also asked to disseminate the request for interviewees through their own Service-related networks, providing an opportunity for snowball sampling [Berg, 1988].

The profile of these interviewees is reported in Appendix 8.

The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights regarding their:

- Journey to AHED;
- Journey through AHED; and
- Engagement with HE.

Semi-structured interviews used specific prompts [Appendix 9] to provide a focus for the interviews whilst allowing flexibility to further explore points raised by interviewees. Whenever possible, face-

to-face interviews were arranged. However, due to interviewee locations and availability, six of the 39 interviews had to be conducted over the telephone. These interviews, ranging in length from 30 to 75 minutes, were audio-recorded, with fully-informed consent of the interviewees, and transcribed in full.

Development of final recommendations

The final recommendations for both C-facing and M-facing organisations to consider were developed in collaboration with professional stakeholders from both sectors.

Draft recommendations, together with supporting evidence from the research's findings, were shared via email correspondence, with M-facing and C-facing C-IG providers and Access Co-ordinators, who had been involved in the project as interviewees or as members of the project's steering group.

Those consulted were asked to comment specifically on the draft recommendations that had implications for their own organisation.

Specifically, the consultation asked:

- When considering the supporting evidence provided, do you consider the recommendation to be appropriately drafted?
- Do you consider the recommendation to be appropriately directed? If not, please advise; and
- Has the recommendation been superseded by changes within your organisation or sector, within the past year, that now seeks to address the premise of the recommendation? If yes, please state.

The profile of those consulted on the draft recommendations, is provided in Appendix 10. The final recommendations have been informed by the feedback received from this consultation stage.

2.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Approaches to the analysis of the data were designed to address the research questions and the project's aims.

Profiling of AHED students with a Service background in the South West Region

Data from the AHED Providers' Annual Returns for 2013/14 and 2014/15 to the AVA was analysed by the following factors:

- The % of AHED providers that produced this data for each year and for both years.
- For each year and for each AHED provider's return:
 - % adults with a Service background
 - % spouses with a Service background
 - Service affiliation: Army, Navy, Marines, RAF, Unspecified
 - % adults with a Serving background
 - Service affiliation: Army, Navy, Marines, RAF, Unspecified
 - Length of Service: <4years; 4-6 years; >6 years; not specified.

Survey of Access Co-ordinators

Data from the Access Co-ordinators' online survey was analysed by the following factors:

- % Access Co-ordinator responses;
- % FEI responses;
- % aware of military community in recruitment area;
- % whose work brings them into contact with military professionals;
- % aware of military resettlement support for SLs;
- % aware of the Career Transition Partnership's (CTP) 'Preferred Provider' list;
- % aware of the Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Service's (ELCAS) 'Approved Provider' list;
- % aware of students with a Service background on their current course

- Profile of these students;
- % who promote their courses to a local military community; and
- Vehicles used for promoting AHED courses.

Workshop with Access Co-ordinators

Workshop group summaries were collated based on:

- Opportunities for promoting AHED to adults with a Service background; and
- Potential barriers to knowledge of and engagement with AHED by adults with a Service background.

Analysis of research interviews

A manual, thematic analysis [Glaser, 1965] was conducted on full interview transcripts. This analysis was framed by the research's aims and, as such, employed the two key themes: i) Knowledge of AHED; and ii) Engagement with AHED, by both AHED students and potential AHED students.

Preliminary analysis from a sample of transcripts identified the following sets of categories, for each of these themes. This provided a working analytical framework that was then applied to all full interview transcripts.

Theme 1: Knowledge of AHED

Categories:

- Access to Adult C-IAG;
- Promotion of AHED; and
- Provision of AHED-related IAG.

Theme 2: Engagement with AHED

Categories:

- Opportunities for personal education during Service;
- Format of AHED courses;
- Funding AHED and degree fees;
- Funding living costs at FE;
- Currency of military qualifications;
- GCSE requirements for HE;
- Relocation in Service;

- Learning support at FE;
- Childcare; and
- Transition Experience.

This analysis employed an Excel spreadsheet matrix. Data was charted on to this matrix to enable analysis by category and by case. Charting was a lengthy, iterative process, involving the summarising of data, by category, from each transcript; and included illustrative, attributable quotations from the transcripts, to keep the summaries close to the original data and to provide a voice for the interviewees.

2.6 LIMITATIONS

As the past, current and potential AHED student interviewees, self-selected, it is acknowledged that the findings from these interviews are unlikely to be representative of all past, current and potential AHED students with a Service background. Those who had experienced particular barriers on their journey to and through an AHED course were perhaps more likely to have been motivated to give up their time to participate in the research interviews than those students who had a smoother experience. However, regardless of their motives for choosing to get involved, their experiences offer valuable insights into issues that AHED students can and do face because of their Service background.

Additional support was provided to the research by an H4H-funded Armed Forces Consultant. A key function of this post was to support recruitment of potential AHED students, who were considered to be a potentially harder cohort to recruit. This consultant's networks through H4H, may have facilitated a bias towards recruitment of interviewees that were either medically discharged ex-Service personnel, or the spouses of medically discharged personnel. Although this may have influenced the recruitment profile, the experiences of these medically-discharged personnel provided valuable insights, particularly in relation to the nature of the support that they had received for their journey to AHED, through the comprehensive

resettlement package available to those who are medically discharged.

Many of the C-IAG professionals who were interviewed and participated in the workshops were introduced to the project by members of the project's steering group. This will have had some influence on those who became involved because they are more likely to have a professional interest in the significance of the research outcomes. However, this study is exploratory in nature and this particular cohort of interviewees provided important insights into factors that can and do impact on knowledge of and engagement with AHED, by adults with a Service background.

Finally, the views expressed by interviewees and workshop participants, have been provided as personal truths. It is not within the remit of this research to clarify their accuracy. As such, all views have been considered equally; in both illuminating a range of factors that can impact on the AHED experience of adults with a Service background and in developing the recommendations that are aimed at improving the journey to and through AHED for these adults.

3. Findings



The findings are summarised under three sections: (i) Profile of Access to Higher Education Diploma students with a Service background; (ii) Factors impacting on knowledge of the Access to Higher Education Diploma; and (iii) Factors impacting on engagement with the Access to Higher Education Diploma. Within each of these sections, insights from the data are reported.

3.1 PROFILE OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) STUDENTS WITH A SERVICE BACKGROUND

This research does not claim to have recruited a representative sample of AHED students with a Service background, relying as it did on the self-selection of AHED student interviewees and snowball sampling. However, the findings illuminated interesting issues with respect to the profiles of AHED students with a Service background.

Almost two thirds of the AHED students recruited as interviewees were adults with a Serving background, the remaining third being spouses. Despite much effort, no Early Service Leavers (ESL) were recruited to the study. Neither, despite the project's recruitment materials being aimed equally at them, were there any dependant adult children recruited.

The data generated for the research by the Access Validating Agency's (AVA) 'End of Year Reviews', that aimed to both quantify and profile the region's AHED students with a Service background, indicated that dependant adult children represented less than 8% of this cohort. This apparent dearth of ESLs and

dependant adult children taking AHEDs may be related to the fact that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan is not available to those under 24 years, which is likely to include the majority of dependant adult children and many ESLs. The introduction of the 19+ Advanced Learner Loan in August 2016 will benefit those ESLs and dependant adult Service children who want to consider AHED.

Past, current and potential AHED student interviewee recruitment had been targeted across the three Services and at Service Leavers, ex-Service personnel, Service spouses, ex-Service spouses and dependant adult Service children. 62% (n=39) of these interviewees had a Serving background, with the majority coming from the non-commissioned ranks of the Army, at Lance Corporal equivalent, or below.

The detailed profile of these adults with a Serving background (n=24) included:

- 58% were from the Army, 25% from the Navy/Marines and 17% from the RAF;
- 92% were ex-Service;
- 8% were SLs;
- 46% had been medically discharged;
- 33% had served for more than 6 years;
- 13% had served for 4-6 years;
- There were no ESLs;
- 88% were from non-commissioned ranks (of these 57% were Army, 24% Navy/Marine and 19% RAF);
- 67% were at the rank of Lance Corporal equivalent or below (69% were Army, 31% Navy/Marine);
- 54% were current AHED students, 29% were past AHED students and 17% were potential AHED students; and
- 63% male and 37% female.

The remaining 38% (n=39) of the past, current and potential AHED student interviewees were female spouses.

The detailed profile of these spouses (n=15) included:

- 47% from the Army, 13% from the Navy/Marines and 40% from the RAF;
- 73% were current Service spouses (of these 36% were Army, 18% Navy/Marine, 46% RAF);
- 27% were ex-Service spouses (of these 75% were Army, 0% Navy/Marine, 25% RAF);
- 13% were spouses of medically-discharged personnel;
- 40% were current AHED students, 40% were past AHED students and 20% were potential AHED students; and
- 100% were female.

39% of the Access Co-ordinators who responded to the research survey (n=18) reported being aware of having had AHED students with a Service background on their recent courses. Although Access Co-ordinators suggested that there had been a decline in the number of their AHED students with a Service background, over recent years, none indicated that this was based on formally recorded data.

Access Co-ordinator responses to the additional question included in AVA's End of Year Reviews for 2013/14 and 2014/15, which asked them to record the number of their AHED students with a Service background and the nature of their link to the Services, produced variable responses from the FEIs. 37% (n=24) did not provide any data for 2013/14 and 42% did not provide any data for 2014/15; 42% returned data for both years. Data from the FEIs that responded provided a total student cohort of adults with a Service-related background of 28 for 2013/14 and 25 for 2014/15. A more detailed analysis of the data suggested that adults with an Army background dominated this cohort of AHED students for 2013/14 and 2014/15.

In 2013/14 67% (n=15) of the FEI respondents recorded AHED students with a Service background and indicated that they represented:

- Between 1 to 10% of their total AHED student cohort; with a median of 4.3%;
- 36% (n=28) were spouses: 90% with an Army background and 10% with a Navy background;
- 57% (n=28) were ex-Service: of these 63% were from the Army, 31% Navy and 6% RAF; and
- 7% (n=28) were Army dependant adult children.

Of the 58% of FEIs that provided data in 2014/15, 86% (n=14) recorded AHED students with a Service background and indicated that they represented:

- Between 1 and 25% of their AHED student cohort, with a median of 3%;
- 28% (n=25) were spouses, of which 29% were Army, 14% Navy and 57% unspecified Service;
- 68% (n=25) were ex-Service, of which 77% were Army, 18% RAF and 5% Navy; and
- 4% (n=25) were dependant adult children.

Several Access Co-ordinators talked about the problems that they had encountered in generating this specific cohort data because they had had to rely on their AHED students volunteering this information. The AVA also indicated that, although the specific question to capture this cohort data had been included in their End of Year Review, to support data generation for this research, the FEIs could only be requested to provide this data; they were not mandated to provide it, because it had not formed part of their contractual agreement with the AVA.

The majority, 73% (n=15), of the spouses interviewed were planning to study, or were already studying an NHS-funded nursing degree and 21% (n=24) of those with a Serving background were planning to do so. C-facing C-IAG professionals, AHED sector professionals and spouses all talked about the popularity of nursing amongst Service spouses, because it was seen as a portable career

option that could be accommodated, to some degree, within mobile Service family lives.

The planned withdrawal of the NHS-funded degrees and bursaries from 2017 will clearly impact negatively on these spouses, because they do not have access to any bespoke MOD funds to support their degree fees, unlike many of their Serving or ex-Service partners.

Insights:

- Ex-service personnel dominated the AHED student with a Service background cohort, with a majority from the non-commissioned ranks of the Army at Lance Corporal equivalent, or below.
- There was a lack of representation amongst AHED students from those who were either ESLs or dependant adult children; likely related to many from these cohorts being too young to be eligible for the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan.
- Recording data on the number and profile of AHED students with a Service background was problematic because: i) it required students to be prepared to volunteer this information; and ii) FEIs were not mandated by their AVAs to generate this data.
- The majority of spouses interviewed were on a career path to nursing, through NHS-funded degrees and NHS bursaries and the planned withdrawal of the NHS-funded degrees and bursaries will impact negatively on this cohort.

3.2 FACTORS IMPACTING ON KNOWLEDGE OF THE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED)

The findings from the interviews, workshops and survey infer that the factors that impact on an adult with a Service background's knowledge and understanding of AHED are linked to three key categories:

1. Access to Adult C-IAG;
2. Promotion of AHED; and
3. Provision of informed AHED-related IAG.

3.2.1 ACCESS TO ADULT CAREER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (C-IAG)

Civilian-facing (C-facing) professionals talked about Adult C-IAG being available through FEI Adults Careers Services and the National Careers Service (NCS). However, they suggested that the free provision of Adult C-IAG to civilians had reduced in recent years and had been negatively impacted by the re-contracting of NCS provision, leaving patchy provision in many areas.

One of the FEI Career Advisers (CA) talked about their Adult Careers IAG service being delivered through an NCS contract. However, because the service was branded as FEI, they suggested that their clients would likely be unaware that it was, in fact, NCS provision.

Other FEI CAs described their Adult C-IAG provision as having been reduced since the issue of the new NCS contracts, resulting in a more limited provision.

Several C-facing and M-facing professionals suggested that many adults were not aware of the free, impartial Adult C-IAG available through FEIs and that more should be done to promote this provision.

...I deliver to adults at any stage of their career... So we're basically open to anyone in the community... I just think that people don't know there's that resource here. [FECA-1]

The Future Horizon Programme's (FHP) Special Employment Consultants (SEC) talked about particular problems that some of their ESL clients had recently reported, when trying to get C-IAG support through the NCS; one described the current NCS provision to adults, as being almost non-existent.

Interviews with past, current and potential students indicated that many had not been aware of opportunities available to them to receive free Adults C-IAG through the NCS or via FEI Careers Services; many had not even heard of the NCS. A lack of knowledge about the availability of free, Adult C-IAG would likely be a particular issue for those students who were spouses, ESLs or non-medically discharged ex-Service, most of whom have to rely on C-facing C-IAG because they have much more limited access, or in many cases no access, to M-facing C-IAG.

The HIVE Information Officer had not been aware of the NCS and therefore was not signposting C-IAG seeking enquiries, from Service spouses and dependant adult children, to the NCS.

There was a mixed picture from student interviewees, regarding their experience of Adult C-IAG support from the NCS. Over half of the spouses and those with a Serving background had not heard of the NCS. Of those that had, only a small number, all spouses, had actually tried to engage with NCS support. Of these, a few described receiving helpful support from the NCS for their journey to AHED; the others talked about not being able to get any support, either because they believed they were too old to use the NCS, or because they had been told by the NCS that they were too old to receive support.

I rang the National Careers Service and one of them told me that... technically I was too old for them to help me. [ArmySp-MD/2]

FEI CAs talked about the new NCS contracts being incentivised for work with priority adult groups, and that much of it was now being delivered through Job Centre Plus (JC+). However, one of these priority groups does include adults without a Level 3 qualification, which would include potential AHED students. A JC+ professional talked about how being on benefits was currently a barrier to HE because JC+'s priority was to get people off benefits and into work.

If people on benefits want to go down the route of Higher Education that's very difficult, because it's completely out of the scope of the benefits system. [JC+]

As a consequence, those attending JC+ are unlikely to receive any C-IAG that would involve a journey to HE. However, a JC+ professional suggested that this may change in the future with the roll-out of Universal Credit, which is both an in-work and an out-of-work benefit.

With Universal Credit... for the first time ever, we're going to see people access the services of the Job Centre in order to develop themselves further... and that may include the education route but we don't know yet what that's going to look like. [JC+]

Professional and student interviewees mentioned the posts of JC+ Armed Forces Champions. FHP SECs, in particular, talked about referring their ESL clients to these Armed Forces Champions, as many of their ESL clients, usually aged between 18 and 25 years, find themselves in the benefit system after discharge. Many M-facing C-IAG professionals referred to the diversity of this Armed Forces Champion role as being potentially problematic, when they wanted to refer their clients to the post. In some areas it seemed appropriate to refer clients directly to this post; but in other areas such referrals could not be made, either because the post no longer existed, or because the remit of the post did not include face-to-face support to JC+ clients, but rather was to advise JC+ staff on their provision of Service-friendly support to these particular clients.

It's difficult with [Armed Forces Champions]... some Job Centres have them, some don't and they're all different. [FHP-3]

Our contact with the Armed Forces Champion was lost about two years ago... which is disappointing because at one time they did actively engage with us... it was a useful role. [HIVE]

One ex-Service student talked about not having been able to get any C-IAG from JC+ regarding his aspiration to go to university through an AHED and about being frustrated at a system that did not encourage or enable those on benefits to go to HE.

An FEI CA talked about their experience in trying, but failing, to deliver some outreach C-IAG through a local HIVE by aiming to target outreach provision at Service spouses, who are the main HIVE users. The venture had failed because the HIVE had been unable to offer a private meeting space, or support the CA to co-ordinate an appointment system. The CA felt that this was a missed opportunity for Service spouses and dependant adult children.

Most C-facing professionals talked about their lack of detailed understanding regarding the opportunities for Serving personnel to access M-facing C-IAG through Service Education Centres or through resettlement support; this lack of understanding appeared to be compounded by the fact that they had struggled to develop professional relationships with M-facing professionals. Several military professionals talked about their awareness that it can be challenging for civilian professionals to first identify and then establish contacts within the military.

M-facing C-IAG professionals talked about a potential for their C-IAG to be supported if they could collaborate with relevant professionals within the civilian sector; they suggested that it would offer them scope to better understand the range of civilian opportunities available to SLs and provide a more dove-tailed approach to the IAG that SLs received.

An H4H Careers Adviser, who had a C-facing C-IAG background, talked about the important function that C-IAG networking meetings played within the civilian sector and proposed that there needed to be networking opportunities created for C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals, to improve the C-IAG that each sector provides to adults with a Service background.

When I worked in the civilian Career Guidance sector, we used to have what we called IAG Network meetings, although the military weren't invited... In fact, I used to work next door to H4H then, without knowing that they even existed... [H4H-2]

Many M-facing C-IAG professionals said that they would welcome an opportunity to be able to refer their clients to bespoke, Service-friendly advisers within FEIs and HEIs, particularly clients who were Wounded, Injured or Sick (WIS) or medically discharged, as they have often experienced a loss in confidence due to their illness or injury. They proposed that any such roles should be held by people who know and understand the military context. Ex-Service personnel and spouses also suggested that Service-Friendly Open Days and having someone available at an FEI and HEI who understood the military context would have helped them on their journey to HE through AHED.

It's almost like there's a link missing, between the university and the resettlement and that middle link is someone that knows both... that would make our lives so much easier... [RAFMD/1]

A professional from a Service Family Federation described particular links that they had with some FEIs that ran bespoke courses for Service spouses; they also talked about an upcoming event by one of these FEIs, an Open Day specifically for the military community. They also had links with an HEI that not only provided many distance learning courses but had a dedicated link on its website for adults with a Service background.

...they're putting on a massive Open Day at the college, specifically for the military community... and it was the college that approached us to do this, which is really great. [SFF]

The MOD has a comprehensive system of resettlement support in place to support SLs in managing their transition to post-military employment and careers. The first line of this resettlement support is provided to all SLs, regardless of time-served, and is delivered through Unit-level Officers within each Service; this provides an early opportunity for SLs to be signposted to relevant information helpful to their post-military career aspirations.

Those who have served for more than four years were mandated to receive a second line resettlement interview, again delivered by the individual Services. This interview provided SLs with an opportunity to start C-IAG discussions. Comprehensive C-IAG is then provided by the CTP, as a third line of resettlement. The vast majority of SLs who are eligible to receive C-IAG from CTP engage with this tri-Service offer. However, this more comprehensive level of C-IAG, which is available from two years before discharge and for up to two years after discharge, is only available to those who have served for more than 6 years or, through CTP-Assist, to those who have been medically discharged.

Those who leave Service within four years are termed Early Service Leavers (ESL). ESLs have access to a more limited resettlement employment support package, the Future Horizons Programme (FHP), which is also delivered through CTP. Resettlement support to ESLs tends to be delivered more virtually, though telephone and emails and has more of a focus on employment support.

M-facing C-IAG professionals talked about how the military encouraged HE for Serving personnel much more today than previously.

A few M-facing C-IAG professionals mentioned cases where SLs had not been able to engage fully with their resettlement support. They suggested that this was likely a consequence of increased manning pressures within a decreased military workforce.

...those out at sea are disadvantaged... they have very little access to the internet... they may have to delay their engagement with CTP... some, right up until a few months before they are discharged. [CTP-2]

Two ex-Service personnel talked specifically about their own experiences of not being able to engage fully with their resettlement support. In one case, a Navy SL talked about his work commitment which resulted in him having to work at sea until his discharge date.

I didn't have any conversations about my resettlement at all. I was on board ship until the very last day... [Navy4-6]

In another case, an RAF SL had had an unexpectedly abrupt medical discharge, apparently without receiving his 2nd Line resettlement interview.

...it can be awkward if your resettlement dates coincide with something they need you at work for, they won't allow you to go, even if it's your resettlement time... [RAF>6]

One ex-Service personnel who had served for 23 years was shocked to discover that they weren't eligible for any support from CTP because they had requested to leave a year earlier than their contract and were not aware of the consequences, until it had been too late.

CTP Career Consultants (CC) talked about their role being focused on supporting SLs' post-military careers, rather than on the provision of job-finding support, which was delivered to SLs through CTP, by the Royal Forces Employment Agency's (RFEA) Employment Consultants. CTP-Assist SECs, who provide resettlement support to WIS SLs, talked about working to support their client's 'Preferred Vocational Outcome' which could include FE and HE.

Many M-facing and C-facing C-IAG professionals suggested that, for the vast majority of their clients with a Service background, academic study was not a high priority, even for those SLs who were aware that they could get a free degree through the Publicly-Funded Further Education/Higher Education (PF FE/HE) Scheme. In their experience, the focus for most SLs had been on securing post-military employment, with few having expressed an interest in HE, particularly SLs who had a family to support.

...we've got a lot to pack in our first meeting... we might explore FE but giving up a salary is the biggest issue for many... [CTP-2]

Several M-facing and C-facing professionals suggested that many of their clients would be put off at the mention of the word 'university', because of their preconceived ideas about HE, believing it wasn't for them.

I think the word 'university' scares them because a lot of soldiers aren't high achievers and it's getting past that... saying look at an Access course... [CTP/A-1]

Most Service people that I see are not hugely interested in Access... they're usually very much thinking about getting work... the main issue I suppose is that they don't really know what university would be like for them... [FECA-1]

The pool that the infantry sort of dip into are lads from Council Estates that haven't done particularly well at school... when they hear university they sort of assume that you're not talking about them. [ArmyMD/4].

However, the vast majority of the ex-Service personnel who were interviewed, many of whom were from lower military ranks, talked about having been frustrated with the C-IAG that they had received during their resettlement. They particularly referred to the C-IAG provided by CTP, which they felt had been more focused on helping them find a post-military job rather than a post-military career,

with HE options having rarely been raised during C-IAG discussions. They said that they would have liked their C-IAG to have been more aspirational, particularly around opportunities for post military careers that required a degree.

... the CTP workshops contained literally nothing on university or Access... When I asked CTP about university... they said go and talk to the IERO... the IERO should have been able to advise me on going to university. He didn't. CTP should have been able to advise me on going to university but they didn't... this was stressful when you're coping with PTSD at the same time. ...CTP need someone from Access to come along to these workshops... just to spark some ideas in people's heads. [ArmyMD/1]

The Access course was never discussed during any of my resettlement interviews... the focus was on professional training utilising skills acquired in Service. University didn't come up in any conversation. [NavyMD/2]

CTP was purely about helping you write your CV to get a job... there was nothing about education, nothing about going to university or college, those sort of things you've got to do yourself. [RAF>6]

I didn't get any sort of information on university or further education. ...I know the thought of going to university seems too big for a lot of people... but to try and get people like myself to know about AHED... people who are kind of open to different things... the Education centres and the career transition people... should be the first port of call for finding out about Access courses... [Navy>6]

...the whole resettlement thing was focussed on... you getting a job... they didn't talk about college or university. It had nothing to do with trying to further yourself... and I was like, hang on a minute, I can go to a job but I actually want to do something more fulfilling... [MarineMD/2]

Several resettlement C-IAG professionals felt that SLs, particularly those that need to plan and prepare for HE through AHED, would benefit from access to C-IAG earlier than the current resettlement period. This was echoed by many ex-Service personnel. It appeared that many SLs had either found that they had left their planning too late in their resettlement period or, due to military work commitments, found that they had been unable to plan and prepare effectively during the resettlement period. Clearly, there is potential for this to impact negatively on those considering HE through AHED, assuming they were aware of AHED in the first place.

...the other issue is catching someone early... Now to do something effective like the FE/HE scheme, they need to engage much sooner in their military careers... [IERO-1]

I think that we should be providing formal personal development interviews at an earlier stage of a person's career. So hopefully, by the time they get to their last two years of Service, it doesn't come as a shock to them. [NET-1]

...it would help us if we could offer support much earlier than the resettlement process... to help them to manage their career aspirations... [CTP-3]

CTP should be there for you earlier on... for career development and your pathway after leaving the Army... [ArmyWIS]

You need to be encouraged to start thinking about what you might do when you leave, much earlier... probably 4 or 5 years... because, if like myself you don't have any qualifications, then you've got to start planning quite a long way back... I knew that I needed to get additional qualifications three years before I left. It would definitely have been helpful to have been able to get some IAG at that point... but I wasn't able to ask CTP any questions... you can only do that in your last 2 years. [Army>6/6]

Several ex-Service personnel talked about living in a military 'bubble' whilst Serving and how they

believed that this had impacted negatively on their information-seeking skills and pre-discharge planning for their post-military careers. One talked specifically about M-facing professionals needing to be supportive and patient with those SLs who may appear, initially, to be disinterested in furthering their education. These same ex-Service personnel suggested that a combined lack of agency and fear for their future inhibited many from initiating an exploration of HE options. They said that M-facing C-IAG should help SLs to be more aspirational for their post-military career planning journey and should not assume that all SLs will have the necessary skills to pursue this journey independently, even those who are capable of future academic success at HE.

...those who've been living in a military bubble... may need extra support and guidance... [Army>6/3]

Interviews with resettlement staff from a Navy Education Centre described recent structural changes within the centre to enable their staff to provide a more blended approach to the provision of IAG on adult education and resettlement. They talked about the centre's aim being to offer Service personnel learning opportunities throughout their Service career, providing adult education that not only supported their military careers, but also helped personnel to plan and prepare effectively for a post-military career.

I see resettlement as the culmination of the through-life learning of a Serviceman's career, gearing them up for subsequent civilian employment and we're taking steps to re-integrate education and resettlement such that there isn't the clear divide. [NET-2]

The Navy Education Centre also provided a venue for outside course providers to deliver courses to personnel on the base; the centre's ethos of 'Lifelong Learning' was celebrated through a regular 'Festival of Learning' on the base.

Continued access to C-IAG was available to medically discharged personnel, beyond the period of their official resettlement support from CTP or CTP-Assist, through the H4H Career Recovery Service. Life-long employment support, including an element of careers support, was available to all ex-Service personnel, including ESLs, through the RFEA - the Forces Employment Charity. However, several ex-Service students, including some who had been medically discharged, but were no longer eligible for CTP support, talked about finding themselves in a position of needing further C-IAG, once they had secured their AHED qualifications, but not aware of where they could get this support. None knew about the NCS.

I'm at a crossroads and I'm struggling. I want to do something and I almost feel like a 16-year old needing careers advice again... I feel like I'm on the verge... I'm 42... and I've got an awful long time to either do nothing or do something and I really don't know what I want to do or where to get help... I didn't know that the National Careers Service existed... that would be a great link to have. [ArmyMD/4]

The spouses interviewed had much more limited access to C-IAG, even those whose partners were in resettlement. Many Service spouses, particularly Army spouses, had experienced a highly mobile Service life and talked about how this mobility had prevented them from progressing their own careers whilst in a Serving family. Many had found themselves under-skilled or under-employed. They described having sacrificed their careers to support the military careers of their partners.

Spouses also talked about having to face the challenges of transition along with their partner, but said that, unlike their SL partner, they had no C-IAG support from the military to help them with their transition.

A Unit Welfare Officer talked about his role in signposting and how he was available to provide support to Service spouses and dependants,

although he said that many feel there is a stigma attached to approaching 'Welfare' and becoming a 'welfare case'. He suggested that he could usefully signpost Service families to local adult education opportunities and career guidance provision and that he could include such information in the 'Welcome Pack' that the Unit provided to all new families.

Both C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals also talked about the career needs of Service spouses being overlooked, particularly with respect to the lack of bespoke C-IAG for Service spouses whose partners were in resettlement.

...many spouses' careers have been put on the back-burner because the focus had been on their military partner... [CTP-1]

...spouses need to be able to get professional career advice from somebody that really understands where they're coming from... CTP should be supporting spouses too... [RFS]

... Service spouses need career advice to help them think about their future... [FECA-3]

...the wives haven't had the opportunity to develop a career because they've been moving from place to place... I think it's a huge issue for spouses... I hear that Service wives have to look for short-term, fairly low skilled jobs... and it's not just spouses, it's dependants as well... [LEP]

I don't engage with spouses... but I think we should... [CTP/A-3]

I do think it's important that the other halves, the spouses, get support for resettlement... because they do kind of get lost in resettlement... [CTP-4]

Whereas the soldier has all the advice on hand, the spouse has none of that and when they've been out of work for 10 years, following their soldier around, those key kind of employability toolkits... are crucial for them in resettlement... [SFF]

Several M-facing professionals suggested that the Armed Forces Covenant should be used as leverage to ensure that a spouse's education and career is not impacted negatively by their Service background.

The Armed Forces Covenant is great, it's a pledge but that's all it is, a pledge... but what is being done? How is it being actioned? [RFS]

Resettlement C-IAG professionals suggested that resources within Navy and RAF Education Centres were more accessible to Service spouses than those within Army Education Centres. Many spouses also talked about a notable decrease, over recent years, in the military support available to them through their Service Education Centres.

I've been married to my husband for like 18 years and I've noticed a massive change in terms of what's available and promoted to spouses... compared to years ago... basically, it's gone to nothing... [ArmySp-IN/3]

Several Service spouses who had experienced overseas postings felt that support for spouse adult education had been much better from overseas' Service Education Centres.

Overseas seem to be a lot better at helping spouses with their education... they have an Open University clerk and civilian courses, all available to a spouse posted overseas... but not in the UK... [RAFSp-IN/5]

M-facing professionals talked about some cases where Service spouses, whose partners were WIS or had been medically discharged, were able to receive C-IAG by H4H CAs or in rarer cases, CTP-Assist SECs. In the case of CTP-Assist, provision was only available in cases where the SL was unable to benefit from resettlement support and the support had been transferred to the spouse. One spouse of a medically discharged personnel talked about her frustration at finding out, too late, that they could have had their partner's resettlement package transferred to them. They had been told that the agreement should have been made at their partner's Medical Board, but they

had not been made aware of the procedure in time.

Theoretically we can work with spouses or partners or the broader family as well... it's all new and developing... I do think it's important that we do support spouses... [H4H-2]

Insight relating to C-facing and M-facing provision

- Networking opportunities between M-facing and C-facing C-IAG providers would enhance the C-IAG provision, by both sectors, to adults with a Service background.

Insights relating to C-facing provision

- A lack of awareness amongst adults with a Service background and some M-facing C-IAG professionals, regarding the free provision of Adult C-IAG available through the National Careers Service and FEI Careers Services.
- Being on benefits is a barrier to aspirational careers through HE; this may change with the completion of the roll-out of Universal Credit, which is both an in-work and out-of-work benefit.
- There are opportunities for FEI Careers Services to deliver outreach Adult C-IAG to military communities, through M-facing venues such as the HIVEs.
- FEI and HEI provision of Service-friendly Open Days and Service-friendly Admission Advisers would be welcomed by both adults with a Serving background and by M-facing C-IAG professionals
- The Armed Forces Covenant could be used as leverage to widen participation in HE for adults with a Service background who are seeking to develop a career path in transition, particularly for spouses with a Service background.

Insights relating to M-facing provision

- A few cases were reported, where SLs were unable to engage fully with the resettlement C-IAG support to which they were eligible, potentially a greater issue for those in the Navy. It was suggested that one cause may be increasing work pressures within a decreasing military workforce.
- Ex-Service personnel felt that Career Transition Partnership (CTP) had failed to provide them with aspirational C-IAG, with little mention of career opportunities that required a degree. This appeared to be a particular issue for those from lower ranks and for those from the Army.
- Provision of C-IAG to Serving personnel earlier than the current resettlement period, would enable more effective planning and preparation for post-military careers, particularly important for those that require a degree as part of their career pathway.
- Ex-Service personnel who find that they need C-IAG beyond the period of their eligibility for resettlement C-IAG were unclear where to find such support.
- Diversity regarding the availability and provision of Armed Forces Champions by Job Centre Plus was problematic for many M-facing C-IAG professionals signposting to these posts.
- Raising awareness of local adult education opportunities and adult C-IAG provision for Service families could start at Unit level, through signposting to such provision through the Unit Welcome Packs that all families receive.
- The career needs of Service spouses are overlooked by the military, particularly those in resettlement. This appeared to be a particular issue for Army spouses who experienced high

levels of mobility that had prevented them from progressing their career plans, leaving many either unemployed or under-employed.

- Eligible spouses of Wounded Injured or Sick (WIS) personnel need to be aware of the process and timeline for requesting the transfer of their partner's resettlement package.

3.2.2 PROMOTION OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED)

Interviews with past, current and potential AHED students indicated that AHED had not been well promoted to those with a Serving background, or to spouses with a Service background, with the majority recalling that they had first been made aware of AHED informally, through family, friends or colleagues.

...[SLs] just don't know that Access courses exist. [NET-2]

We don't advertise our Access courses to the military specifically... but we absolutely should... [Access-2]

Word-of-mouth seems to be our strongest tool... I know it is in most places... [Access-3]

63% (n=24) of adults with a Serving background were first made aware informally, 12% through direct contact with an FEI or HEI, 8% through a resettlement professional and 17% through independent internet searches.

It's amazing how many people just don't know about them. It's crazy. [Navy/MD-1]

67% (n=15) of spouses were first made aware of AHED informally, through family, friends or work colleagues; 20% through direct contact with an FEI or HEI and the remaining 13% through independent internet searches.

...when I tell them what I'm doing... a lot sort of say, crikey, I've always wanted to be a midwife or I've always wanted to do this and I say to them, well you absolutely can and I mention about Access courses... I usually tell them to contact a university... or a local college to find out more information... [RAFSp-IN/4]

We've got like a Facebook group at the base... and I wrote on there that I'd just completed the Access course and I probably had, in my inbox, about 20 messages from people wanting to know more – what I did, how I coped and how did I get there... there are so many wives here saying that they want to be nurses, midwives, whatever but they just don't know about the Access course. [RAFSp-IN/3]

This informal route of AHED promotion was also acknowledged by Access Co-ordinators as being the main way that their students find out about their AHED courses. They talked about AHED not being well promoted to the civilian population, leaving many people at risk of having to discover AHED by chance.

C-facing professionals suggested that most formal introductions to AHED for civilians were through FEI Adult Careers or by HEI Admissions. Several spouses and ex-Service personnel talked about having to find out about AHED as a civilian and that, in their opinion, their needed to be an increase in the general promotion of AHED to increase the chances of these particular cohorts being made aware of AHED.

I'd been out of the Army for four years so it was purely down to me, as a civilian, to go and find out about Access to Higher education courses. [Army>6/3]

One ex-Service personnel talked about their negative encounter with HEI Admissions professionals. They had applied to do a degree course after having left the Navy, before they decided to do an AHED course. They were rejected by the HEI who then sent them a list of qualifications that they should consider, but AHED was not on that list.

Professionals from within the wider AHED sector, including AHED providers, FEI Careers and HEI Outreach and a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), all acknowledged that adults with a Service background provided an untapped market for AHED courses.

From a college business point of view, the military are an obvious source of potential students... [FECA-2]

When I started, I was told oh there's all these Army wives, they're like this untapped resource... low skilled or lacking in qualifications... but I haven't met any yet and no-one has told me how I can... [FECA-1]

...the advantage with Service Leavers is that they're going to come out of the Services with effectively a dowry... so they're a prime target... and many SLs say to us, we've got a pension too... [LEP]

However, only one of the 24 FEIs in the South West region reported that they proactively marketed their courses to students from their local military community, through an FEI post with a remit to recruit adults with a Service background. Another FEI had previously maintained a similar post, but the role had since gone.

...we had had somebody appointed specifically to recruit from the Armed Forces, so I used to brief him fully about our Access courses... but then his role disappeared. [Access-1]

Several C-facing and M-facing professionals suggested that FEIs and HEIs could engage their ex-AHED students with a Service background, as AHED Ambassadors, to support their AHED promotional and marketing campaigns, aimed at recruiting AHED students from this cohort.

...if a university or college could have an ex-military person whose been through the Access course to come and talk to Service Leavers, that would be perfect for these guys... ex-military talking to military just immediately breaks down every barrier... the guys will listen to the ex-military... [CTP/A-1]

Numerous suggestions were made by M-facing and C-facing professionals and from past, current and potential AHED students, regarding potential opportunities for the AHED providers to promote AHED more widely to adults with a Service background, including Service spouses. These suggestions employed the dissemination of bespoke AHED publicity materials, aimed at adults with a Service background.

Information about Access courses should definitely go in the Welcome Packs. I think there was definitely information about local colleges and stuff but it wasn't aimed at the spouses, it was aimed at like older children... [RAFSp-IN/3]

...each camp has a booklet that goes out monthly with everything that's going on... they could promote local Access courses in that... I always read it... [RAFSp-IN/2]

Suggestions to promote AHED to adults with a Service background included:

- Displays in HIVEs;
- Leaflet drops to Service Family Accommodation;
- Publicity about local AHED courses in the regular, local information publications produced by Camps to Service Family Accommodation;
- Publicity in Service Unit resources, including Unit Welcome Packs for families and Unit Resettlement Packs;
- Publicity in Service Education Centres, Resettlement Centres, Personnel Recovery Centres and H4H Recovery Centres;
- Displays in various social hubs located within military communities e.g. Leisure Centres, Libraries and cafes;
- Adverts in resettlement and veteran magazines, including specifically, Quest, Pathfinder, Course for Forces and Focus; and
- Publicity through the Service Family Federations' magazines: Army & You (Army Family Federation), Homeport (Naval Families Federation) and Envoy (RAF Families Federation).

- An AHED sector presence at MOD Transition Fairs, at which spouses and dependant adult children are also invited; and
- FEIs to collaborate with local resettlement providers, to arrange Service-friendly FEI events for SLs, including Open Days and AHED Taster sessions.

...a taster session would make up their minds 100%... The more you could do them in base... the better take up you're going to get... [NET-2]

Promotion at the Transition Fairs would be good because they're open to spouses and dependants, too. [SFF]

One resettlement C-IAG professional, who worked specifically with WIS Serving personnel, proposed that Service-friendly AHED taster sessions could easily be delivered within the Personnel Recovery Centre, if they could be timetabled around their WIS clients' morning rehabilitation sessions.

Access taster sessions would be great... it would get them thinking... and give them a whole new scope because currently Access is not on their radar... [CTP/A-3]

They are often in a really low place in terms of their mental health... they've lost their confidence and self-esteem... that's where tasters and placements really have a massive value... [CTP/A/2]

Several C-facing C-IAG professionals talked about the valuable role that HEI Widening Participation Teams had played in the past in recruiting AHED students with a Service background, particularly by what one referred to as 'community universities', providing targeted outreach Adult C-IAG within military communities. However, they had seen a decrease in recent years in this type of provision by the HEI sector and they believed that this had impacted negatively on the recruitment of AHED students with a Service background.

...in the heyday of widening participation, sort of about 10 years ago, there were some fantastic community-based pre-Access courses... about half a dozen people in community locations... that's where the real powerful work starts... those community sessions paid dividends... but there aren't many of them now. [HE]

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) online resource www.accesstohe.ac.uk provides information about AHED and offers a search facility for AHED courses, including distance learning courses. It also has a link to a series of real life stories from past AHED students. However, none of the M-facing C-IAG professionals were aware of this website.

I thought the Access course was for things like reading, writing and Maths. ...I didn't know about that website, if we can get that link on to our website that would be fantastic... [SFF]

A LEP professional said that AHED could be promoted through the LEP's website and through their Skills Development Programme, being established to meet a regional skills gap which would have SLs as one of their targeted cohorts.

I suspect a lot of Service Leavers don't know about Access to Higher Education; in fact, I did an Access myself... but I didn't even know they were still running. ...so we need some information about it on our website that would be useful... A large part of the Skills Development Programme will be provision of Advice and Guidance and that could include signposting to Access courses. [LEP]

Several M-facing professionals and some ex-Service personnel suggested that the Service Education Centres should raise awareness about AHED amongst Serving personnel, enabling them to start planning and preparing for their post-military career, before their resettlement period.

The military need to make their personnel aware of Access courses while they're Serving... then it's not all a rush to get everything in place... if they knew about Access earlier they could manage their career much better... for when they leave. [CTP-1]

...if they find that they need to get their GCSEs... and they're in their last six months of Service, it kind of promotes panic... it's another hurdle... so constant promotion of Access is needed... and that's something that can be addressed by the Education Centres... [CTP-4]

It would be good to know about Access courses while Serving... I think it would be much better, more beneficial, to let people know at an earlier stage. [NavyMD/1]

The Army Education Centres are really only there to support mandatory courses... geared at tick boxes for promotion and it shouldn't be. It should be a tick in the box really for your future. [Army>6/2]

Information on Access courses should definitely be available in our Education Centres. [RAF>6]

...part of the joining routine is to go to the Education Centre and get a stamp. I think when you go there to get your stamp; they should give you a welcome brief and tell you a bit about the Access courses on offer... [Navy>6]

Career Transition Partnership (CTP) Career Consultants (CC) talked about steering their clients towards courses listed on the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' list, although they said that they made it clear that their clients were not limited to courses on this list, if they found other courses that they would like to undertake. Clearly, AHED course providers would benefit from having their AHED courses listed on the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' list. However, none of the Access Co-ordinators reported being aware of the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' List.

...if you look on the CTP website, there's only about 5 Access courses on their list... anyone looking would automatically think – Oh, they can't be very well recognised by universities... This CTP list seems quite an enclosed way to try and give access to your provision. [FECA-3]

It would be good to know what we could do to recruit more Access students from the Services... I didn't know about the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' List... it would be useful to be on that... [Access-2]

All C-facing professionals said that they needed to have a better understanding of the military resettlement process to enable them to effectively promote AHED to SLs. Several talked about a role for LEPs to support improved networking between military-civilian C-IAG professionals. One FEI CA talked about an up-coming regional event that was being organised by their LEP for Career Advisers (CA) and suggested that M-facing C-IAG providers should also be invited.

...a lot of Government funding is now going through the LEP but we're not really hearing much from them. [FECA-2]

Several M-facing C-IAG professionals indicated that they could use Adult Learners' Week as an opportunity to promote AHED.

...we really ought to get involved in Adult Learners' Week... and engage with the colleges... soldiers are very engaged with Adult Learners' Week... our thing is to engage the families as well... as an organisation we could promote Access through it... [SFF]

Many of the M-facing and C-facing C-IAG professionals interviewed talked about advising SLs without A-levels, who expressed an interest in HE, to consider AHED as an alternative, faster option than A-levels.

I'd certainly dissuade people from doing A-levels... often people are looking at much smaller timescales. [NET-1]

...if they've got their GCSEs in Maths, English and Science, the A-level bit is irrelevant... they should do an Access course instead... [H4H-3]

However, several AHED students described missed opportunities in discussions they had had about A-levels during their resettlement support, when they felt they could and should have been made aware of AHED.

The Education Centre made me aware of the free degree scheme just before I left... but nobody ever mentioned the Access course... they just said you can do A-levels. [NavyMD/1]

I knew that the Army offered funding for degrees... but there was never any sort of mention of Access, only about A-levels. [ArmyMD/1]

One ex-Service student described how he only found out about AHED from his FEI A-level lecturer, after having started an A-level course.

...it wasn't until I was actually in college doing an A-level course, that I even found out what an Access course was... my A-level lecturer said – why are doing this course, why don't you look at doing an Access course... and it went from there... [Navy>6]

Several students talked about their lack of understanding regarding the use of the term 'A-level equivalents' on HEI websites and on the ELCAS and UCAS websites, not having initially realised that it referred to AHED courses.

...it would be helpful on university websites, if it says quite specifically that they take Access, not all of them do, some of them say an 'equivalent'... Well, it wasn't clear to me what an equivalent was... [Navy4-6]

8% (n=24) of the ex-Service personnel interviewed, recalled having been first made aware of AHED through their resettlement C-IAG. Many ex-Service personnel talked about their frustration at not having been made aware of AHED before they were

discharged and suggested that, had they known, they could have started to prepare for their AHED course whilst still in Service.

I wish I'd have known about the Access Diploma before I left the Navy. ...I had a three-month deployment just before I came out, I could have used that time to learn stuff... to set myself up... [Navy4-6]

If I'd known about it while in the Army, I would have looked at trying to do something about it while in Service... [Army>6/5]

A CTP workshop facilitator said that, although CTP did not introduce AHED to their clients during the CTP workshop presentations, they did advise any participants interested in HE to approach them during workshop breaks, for some individual information and advice. However, they acknowledged that this approach did limit opportunities for other workshop participants to be introduced to AHED. They proposed that AHED could be added to the CTP workshop script, to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to be made aware of it.

Several resettlement C-IAG professionals talked about raising AHED only in response to a client expressing an interest in HE. It appeared that AHED was rarely raised with a client during resettlement C-IAG sessions as a prompt to facilitate aspirational discussions about HE and career options that required a degree.

Although the providers of resettlement C-IAG to ESLs said that they had only had a few clients who had expressed an interest in AHED, they indicated that they should be making their clients more aware of AHED, as they felt that some of their clients would benefit from it.

I think Access courses would offer a lot of our [ESL] clients great character building... a change in direction opportunity. [FHP-3]

Resettlement professionals and ex-Service personnel talked about a range of potential opportunities for raising awareness of AHED during resettlement, by including information on AHED in: Resettlement Centres and Education Centres; First Line Resettlement Service Leavers' Pack; CTP Workshops; CTP's e-magazine, Focus and at CTP Employment and Training Fairs.

CTP need to make it clear that you can have the option of doing a degree, even when you don't have A-levels. [Army>6/2]

It would have been good to be introduced to Access during the CTP resettlement workshops... so it stood out to you... [Army>6/5]

...you have to attend a resettlement brief. So that's a really good place to provide information about Access courses... [RAFMD/1]

...CTP need someone from Access to come along to the workshops... just to spark some ideas in people's heads. [ArmyMD/1]

CTP-Assist Specialist Employment Consultants (SECs) talked about a need to promote AHED to their WIS clients and proposed that information about AHED could be available in Personnel Recovery Units and Centres and through the CTP-Assist information portal.

My PRU would have been an ideal place for me to have found out about Access... but I didn't see anything about it... [ArmyMD/1]

FHP SECs suggested that AHED should also be promoted through the RFEA, which provides lifelong employment support to all ex-Service personnel.

H4H Career Advisers talked about the need to raise awareness about AHED with medically discharged personnel and suggested that AHED could be promoted through: the H4H Career Recovery Services; H4H Recovery Centres; H4H Internal Staff Guide; and the H4H Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters networks.

...the main resources that WIS people tend to go to are, at the moment, Help for Heroes... they are there for funding to do courses, so if there was some sort of link to Access course so that H4H could share, that would be great... because the ones that go there are the ones trying to get on with their lives... that have got a thirst for knowledge and want to learn... [ArmyMD/4]

Although spouses talked about HIVEs, in particular, as being an appropriate place for them to find information on AHED and HE courses, none of the spouses had seen anything about AHED in a HIVE. Many spouses talked about a general lack of promotion of adult education opportunities through HIVEs and suggested that the education focus had been on school-age children, not adults.

The HIVE Information Officer interviewed said that their main clients were Service spouses and that they had had very few enquiries about FE or HE; most of their enquiries were related to housing issues. However, they felt that HIVEs could and should be providing more information about adult education opportunities. The HIVE Information Officer was not aware of AHED, but information about local FEIs was included in the HIVE resource sheets. This Information Officer suggested that the HIVE could display information about AHED and could include information about local AHED courses in their regular bulletins that go to all registered Service families.

What frustrates me, quite a lot, you would think we would get an awful lot of information coming our way to disseminate... Although we can disseminate anything, 80% is about housing... we get quite

frustrated you know... we're not there to know everything about everything but we're there to signpost... and we could be signposting to adult education much more... [HIVE]

The HIVEs are a great way to get information out to Service spouses and families... [SFF]

I used to work in a HIVE in Germany so I'm fully aware of the facilities... and I would say they could give out information on things like careers and adult education. I think the HIVEs today could be offering more than they do... [ArmySp-IN/3]

The Service Family Federation Officer, with adult education within their remit, was not aware of AHED. However, they suggested that, for them to effectively signpost clients to information about AHED, they would need to be able to signpost to a 'one-stop-shop' source of easy to navigate information.

...the military community are great lovers of social networks, great lovers of Facebook... and we have our magazines... so we've got a big reach. [SFF]

Many M-facing C-IAG professionals said that their clients would welcome Service-friendly visits to FEIs and HEIs. CTP-Assist SECs, in particular, talked about how their WIS clients could potentially benefit from Service-friendly visits to FEIs and HEIs (because many of their clients had lost confidence since becoming WIS) and proposed that this support could be mediated through the network of 'Universities in Support of Wounded Injured and Sick' (UNSWIS).

I would love to see the whole UNSWIS thing take one step forward... to help find university degree courses for the WIS. [CTP/A-2]

Several M-facing professionals talked about a role for Service Charities in raising awareness about AHED, specifically to ex-Service personnel who are a much harder group to reach, due to their dispersal. One suggestion was made by a M-facing professional, that Cobseo could facilitate the promotion of AHED by Service charities, through its 'Education, Employment & Resettlement' cluster.

Ex-Service personnel talked about some Service charities with which they had engaged. Particular mention was made of the British Legion, Help for Heroes (H4H) and Combat Stress and how it would have been helpful to them had these charities been able to have made them aware of AHED.

My two-week Combat Stress course didn't mention anything about Access... it wasn't an option on the table and I just think that there should have been a link there... [Army>6/3]

A few M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel talked specifically about the plethora of Service charities as presenting a challenge for those wanting to find out which of the Service charities support adult education.

There are so many military charities... it's hard to know if you're signposting to the right one... all these little charities that are so well intentioned and with so many opportunities... but people fall through the net because they don't know where they should or could be accessing charity support... [H4H-2]

Insights relating to C-facing and M-facing organisations:

- Adult Learners' Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness about AHED.
- C-IAG discussions about A-levels, with adults considering HE, provide an opportunity to introduce AHED.
- There appears to be some confusion over the term 'A-level equivalents', with some unaware it also referred to AHED.

Insights relating to C-facing organisations:

- Word-of-mouth was acknowledged, by both AHED sector professionals and AHED students, as the most popular vehicle for finding out about AHED.
- AHED has not been well promoted to the civilian population; this impacts negatively on those adults with a Service background who have to rely on finding out about AHED through the same routes as civilians (notably Service spouses and the ex-Service community).
- Although the AHED sector acknowledged that adults with a Service background are an untapped market for their courses, there was no evidence of any promotional or marketing campaigns directed at this specific cohort.
- Past AHED students with a Service background could provide valuable AHED Ambassadors to recruit AHED students from this cohort.
- The QAA's resource www.accesstohe.ac.uk, which has a link to 'Real Life Stories' from past AHED students, provides an opportunity to include real life stories about AHED students with a Service background.
- M-facing C-IAG providers and their resources, including websites, publications and social media groups, should be used by AHED providers as vehicles to promote AHED to adults with a Service background.
- MOD Transition Fairs, at which adult family members of SLs are also welcomed, provide an opportunity for the AHED sector to promote AHED to adults with a Service background.
- Service-friendly AHED taster sessions, offered at either FEIs and/or in military venues, provide an opportunity for raising awareness of AHED and recruiting AHED students with a Service background.

- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), with their aim to promote economic growth and jobs across their local area, were proposed as a useful resource to support military-civilian networking opportunities for Adult C-IAG professionals; and those LEPs with specific programmes involving the military could usefully raise awareness of AHED within these programmes.
- None of the AHED course providers were aware that the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) had a 'Preferred Provider' list and that only a handful of AHED courses were on this list.

Insights relating to M-facing organisations:

- AHED only appeared to be raised during 2nd line or 3rd line CTP-provided resettlement C-IAG, in response to SLs expressing an interest in HE; it did not appear to be raised to facilitate aspirational discussions about careers that required a degree.
- Although AHED was not routinely introduced during CTP workshops, suggestions were made that it could be included in the CTP workshop script.
- Suggestions for opportunities to raise awareness of AHED amongst Serving personnel, included, through:
 - Service Education Centres;
 - Resettlement Centres;
 - First-line Resettlement Packs, provided by Units;
 - Mandatory 2nd Line Resettlement interviews; and
 - CTP workshops and C-IAG sessions; via CTP-Assists' Portal, CTP Job Fairs and CTP's e-magazine.
- Suggestions for opportunities to raise awareness of AHED amongst Service spouses, included, through:
 - HIVEs; by signposting to

www.accesstohe.ac.uk and local AHED providers; and

- Individual Service Family Federation websites, magazines and social media groups.
- Service charities may have a role to play in raising awareness about AHED, in both the Serving and ex-Service communities, particularly those charities which are members of Cobseo's 'Education, Employment and Resettlement' Cluster.
- There are opportunities to promote AHED to medically discharged personnel and their families through H4H Career Recovery Services, their Recovery Centres and through H4H's Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters Networks.
- An expanded role for UNSWIS could not only be used to raise awareness of AHED amongst WIS personnel, but also to facilitate opportunities for WIS personnel to explore AHED and HE study.

3.2.3 PROVISION OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) RELATED INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE (IAG)

AHED students described a mixture of experiences in the quality of AHED-related IAG that they received from both M-facing and C-facing professionals.

One ex-Service personnel described helpful support that they had had from an HEI Admissions Officer, which had included being guided to a specific FEI for the necessary AHED course. However, two other ex-Service personnel talked about feeling let down by their engagement with HEI Admissions. One said that an HEI failed to make them aware of AHED when they had enquired about routes to a degree course; another said that they had been wrongly advised by HEI Admissions to do an AHED course, when in fact they already had enough UCAS points,

but only found out after they had started their AHED course.

Although the majority of the resettlement professionals were aware of AHED, there were a few with a remit to provide C-IAG who had never heard of AHED. The majority of those who were not aware of AHED were either new to their post, their role was more limited to signposting, or (in the case of the RAF 2nd Line Resettlement provision) their remit did not include IAG on adult education, (which was in the case of the RAF provided by a Personal Learning Adviser).

I don't know anything about Access to HE Diplomas, never heard about them until you got in touch... but I think it would be useful if I did know about them. [RAF 2nd Line Resettlement]

I'm intrigued by these Access courses... that's not what I thought they were... how can I find out about them? [CTP/A-2]

Anyone in the Services whose job includes advising on education or resettlement should know about Access and be able to give out accurate information... [ArmyMD/3]

However, one resettlement C- IAG provider to WIS personnel, who had been in post for some time, was not aware of AHED, which obviously limited opportunities for their clients to consider AHED.

One medically discharged Army personnel, talked about having been given incorrect IAG about AHED by a H4H Career Adviser, who had told them, in error, that they were too old to do an AHED.

I visited H4H and spoke to one of their Careers people... but they gave me the wrong information completely. They told me that the Access course was only available to people between the ages of 19 and 28 years and that I was too old... [ArmyMD/3]

Many of the resettlement professionals, who were aware of AHED, appeared to lack up-to-date

information about AHED, with respect to the new requirement from many HEIs for GCSEs in English, Maths and, depending on the degree course, Science.

...I know about Access... but to be honest with you my knowledge is based on old information... it would be helpful to know what the changes mean... if only to manage our clients' expectations... [H4H-3]

The few resettlement C-IAG professionals, who did know about the changes around GCSEs, expressed how challenging and time consuming they found trying to keep abreast of the changes to AHED; many talked about having to rely on Google.

It's a real struggle to be honest with you, to keep up-to-date with all the changes around Access... how to access it, how to broker funding, what are the minimum qualifications... we need the information and it needs to be really easy to understand... who can we direct our clients to if they have questions about Access... it all needs to be seamless... [FHP-3]

All resettlement C-IAG professionals, talked about wanting to ensure that the AHED-related IAG they provided was up-to-date. Many suggested that a one-stop-shop resource to do with AHED was needed, to offer easy-to-navigate, accurate information about AHED that would both inform their AHED-related IAG and to which they could, with confidence, signpost those clients interested in AHED. Although none had been aware of the QAA's web resource www.accesstohe.ac.uk, many indicated that the website could support their AHED IAG provision.

...I talk about Access courses... But the problem is there's no central place to go to. ...I haven't heard about that website [www.accesstohe.ac.uk] but that's already very useful... if we don't know about it, they won't know about it... [NET-2]

Several ex-Service personnel also said that it would be helpful if there was a single place that adults with a Serving background could go to for some

Service-friendly advice about AHED courses.

...there's no single organisation that Vets can go to for good advice about Access courses... people do what they can on social media but it's all anecdotal... we could do with a centralised place. [Army>6/3]

FHP SECs talked in particular about some of the challenges they faced in supporting their ESL clients, because much of their client work had to be conducted virtually. They emphasised that, to support ESL clients who may be interested in AHED, they would need to feel confident that they were signposting their client to an easy-to-navigate, yet comprehensive source of information about AHED courses and available funding options.

Several resettlement professionals and some ex-Service personnel talked about the favourable promotion of Open University (O.U.) courses to SLs, citing the distance learning element of O.U. courses as more convenient for the Serving lifestyle than courses delivered at FEIs or HEIs. These resettlement professionals also revealed that their knowledge base of O.U. was greater than that of AHED due, in large part, to the fact that they had themselves benefitted from an O.U. degree.

I think the Open University, you know, it's an ideal organisation for people in the military. ...they do have a specialist team which deals with the MOD... they just simply understand the life which is the military. We will point them in the direction of the O.U... [IERO-2]

O.U. degrees are promoted quite a lot, mainly because those promoting it have experienced O.U. and that's what they understand... the problem is, there isn't anyone in the Army who has experienced Access. [ArmyMD/1]

Interviews with several resettlement professionals and two potential AHED students suggested that there was a lack of clarity for some regarding the distinction between AHED Distance Learning

courses and the O.U. Access Modules. The O.U. Access Modules are designed to provide a route to O.U. degrees; unlike the AHED, they are not validated by AVAs to provide access to degree courses at brick universities. This confusion would have implications for anyone who assumed that an O.U. Access Module could provide a distance learning option for a degree course at a brick university.

My plan is to do a distance learning Access course... there's no option for me... I've got a 4-year old and a mortgage to pay... so it will have to be over the computer, probably through the Open University... [ArmyMD/2]

As the colleges don't offer any part-time or evening courses, I have thought about doing a distance learning Access course and will probably do one through the Open University... to actually get me ready for when I go to university, when I leave... [ArmySL]

FEI and HEI professionals interviewed talked about their need and intention to engage with M-facing C-IAG professionals, most notably resettlement professionals, to inform and support their promotion of AHED to SLs.

I would definitely welcome linking up with the military careers people...I've sort of tried in the past to make more links with the military but it's very difficult to pin them down. I don't know now who I should be talking to because the resettlement centre that I used to link with has now gone, so I'm not sure where I go from here. [HE]

...there's work we need to do around resettlement... there's an uncaptured market there... I need to know more about resettlement so I can pass it on to the team. The fact that the young Service Leaver I spoke to last week was really unsure about the whole Access provision and was over the moon with the information I gave her... suggests that we need to be publicising it more to those coming out. [Access-3]

One of the biggest obstacles that FE and HE professionals described was their lack of knowledge and understanding about who to contact within the military and how to develop these contacts. Several military C-IAG professionals themselves acknowledged the challenges that the civilian sector faced in developing professional military contacts and networks within the complex and hierarchical structure that is the military.

We need to strengthen our relationship with the military... I have tried on numerous occasions to promote our courses to the Forces but it's hard to identify the correct person to liaise with... [Access-1]

The Army is a many-headed beast and getting information to the targeted person that you want is actually very difficult for civilians... [IERO-1]

...trying to make connections within the RAF... to be honest, it's probably hit and miss... [RAF 2nd Line Resettlement]

M-facing professionals talked about military-civilian networking being easier to facilitate, when the civilian professionals involved had a Service background.

I've got fairly good links with [X] university, but maybe that's because he's ex-Service... [NET-1]

...from my experience, I think there has to be some Service connection there to make the link. [RAF 2nd Line Resettlement]

The RAF 2nd Line Resettlement provider talked about links that the RAF had developed with specific FEIs and HEIs, leading to the development of bespoke courses for RAF personnel. They suggested that the RAF tend to direct personnel enquiring about FE or HE to these partner institutions.

Many M-facing C-IAG professionals indicated that they, too, would welcome contact with local AHED providers, not only to inform their AHED knowledge

base, but because in their IAG provider role they found it helpful to be able to pick up the phone to a professional that they already knew.

I don't have any links with Access people but it would be useful if I did... I'm out of touch... even though I use to work in FE... but you kind of lose the knowledge... [CTP-4]

I haven't got any contacts in the Access sector yet but I think it would be useful. I'm a big believer, if you have contact... when that [client] walks through the door... I can say, brilliant, I know exactly the person to call... if you know the person on the end of the phone, it's so much easier. [CTP/A-1]

Several M-facing C-IAG professionals suggested that they could usefully invite representatives from the AHED sector to contribute to their staff Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions.

Many professionals and ex-Service personnel talked about there being a need for a better relationship between HEIs, FEIs and military education and careers professionals, particularly to support the promotion of AHED to Serving personnel.

I think it's very important that we're aware of all the other civilian services that exist... it doesn't all have to come from like a Forces charity or a Forces provider... this is especially important for spouses and adult family members. [H4H-2]

The military need a better relationship with the colleges and universities; they should be on board now because the ELCs and free degrees are easy money for them... [RAF>6]

It would be good if colleges came to talk to soldiers about Access... especially to non-commissioned soldiers, they should really be targeted. [Army>6/2]

The Forces go into colleges to recruit but the colleges don't come into the Forces. Which would actually be really good. [Navy>6]

An HEI Widening Participation professional talked about having, in the past, been on a Higher Education Access Committee that had been run by the region's AVA. This committee ran events for AHED sector professionals, with the intention of keeping lines of communication open between the FE and HE sectors. Although these events were now less frequent, they proposed that it would be useful if M-facing C-IAG professionals could be invited to any future meetings, to support mutual networking and improved understanding about AHED.

...we'd have regular, not so much in recent years, but regular forums for Access Co-ordinators, to keep them up-to-date... trying to keep the lines of communication open, not always successfully, between the universities and the colleges... [HE]

Insights relating to C-facing and M-facing organisations:

- Both M-facing C-IAG professionals and professionals from within the AHED sector suggested that their AHED-related IAG to adults with a Service background would be improved if the two sectors had an opportunity to network, collaborate and share AHED-related CPD at a local and regional level.

Insights relating to M-facing organisations:

- Although the majority of M-facing C-IAG professionals were aware of AHED, only a few had been aware of the recent developments within AHED, whereby many HEIs now required AHED students to have GCSEs in English and Maths and (for some degrees) Science, too.
- A minority of M-facing C-IAG professionals, one of whom was a provider of resettlement C-IAG to WIS personnel, had been either unaware of AHED, or had not properly understood the function of AHED as a non-traditional route to HE.
- Although M-facing C-IAG professionals talked about wanting a 'one-stop-shop' source of

information about AHED, none were aware of the QAA's resource on AHED, the website www.accesstohe.ac.uk, which offers information on AHED and a facility to search for AHED courses by subject and/or location. Many indicated, once having been made aware of the website, that it could support M-facing provision of AHED-related IAG and offer them a useful resource to which they could signpost their clients, particularly if it could also provide information on the range of military and civilian funding options available to pay for AHED and HE course fees.

- Open University (O.U.) courses appeared to be favourably promoted by military C-IAG professionals; some had themselves been O.U. students. However, there appeared to be some confusion within the military sector regarding the distinction between Distance AHED courses and the O.U. Access modules.

3.3 FACTORS IMPACTING ON ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED)

The findings from the interviews, workshops and survey infer that the factors that impact on an adult with a Service background's engagement with AHED are linked to ten key categories:

1. Opportunities for personal education during Service;
2. Study format of AHED courses;
3. Funding for AHED and Degree fees;
4. Funding living costs at FE;
5. Currency of Military qualifications;
6. GCSE requirements for HE;
7. Relocation within Service;
8. Learning support at FE;
9. Childcare; and
10. Transition experiences.

3.3.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL EDUCATION DURING SERVICE

M-facing C-IAG professionals and those with a Serving background talked about the negative impact increased workloads within a decreased military workforce had on opportunities for Service personnel, including SLs, to engage in personal education (particularly when a course required regular attendance at an FEI).

...personal education might fall to the wayside as tasks build up with compressed Armed Forces. [CTP-2]

I wanted to do an Access course in Service... but the strain on manning in the Army and the pressures of operations meant that would have been pretty hard to do. [Army>6/2]

...I was doing three people's work at one point, so if I'd gone off and done an Access course, that would have meant somebody else would have had to do four people's jobs... There's not enough man power... there's no time for anything... [NavyMD/1]

...it would have been really helpful if I could have done my Access course in my last year in the Army... but you'd not be given the time off by your management to do it... [ArmyMD/1]

I'm struggling right now... even though I know there's money that you can use for education stuff, there's no time to take advantage of it while still in Service. [ArmyWIS]

A couple of ex-Service personnel talked about there being much more time, a few years ago, for personal study, particularly as you approached your discharge date.

...when I left about 8 years ago... a lot of people coming to their last 6 months were rarely at work... [Army>6/1]

They suggested that opportunities to undertake personal education were greater within the RAF and the Navy than in the Army and that higher ranking SLs had more negotiating power with their Line Managers to get time off for personal study.

I managed to get time off but I was an Officer and that meant that I could negotiate more. [IERO-1]

Personal education is limited and it's probably limited to Officers, this only became apparent when I became an Officer... [Army>6/2]

Officers... get more opportunity for personal education courses... they support each other and cover each other's work... [ArmyWIS]

I was senior. ...I was fortunate because I had a fair amount of autonomy with my working life at that stage... but for sort of junior ranks... that isn't there... I know that for a fact... [RAF>6]

One medically discharged personnel talked about his frustration at not having been allowed to do his AHED while still Serving, feeling that it could have been accommodated and would have helped his transition. Two ex-Army personnel had been given an opportunity to an AHED course at a local FEI, when they were WIS within a Personnel Recovery Unit.

...if I'd had two days a week as part of my resettlement... I could have totally worked around this course... and that would have saved me a year of being unemployed... I could have gone straight into university and there would have been no limbo year... [RAFMD/1]

Access Co-ordinators talked about a noticeable decrease in the number of their students with a Service background over recent years, although no formal data records had been kept to support this observation.

...when I first started in the 90s, there were more people coming through during resettlement than there is now... I mean you'd think we'd have hundreds but we don't... I'd say about 20 years ago, in a class of 20, I'd say a quarter of them would be from the Services. [Access-3]

Several Access Co-ordinators raised the issue of the late timetabling of AHED courses by FEIs, which had impacted negatively on some Serving personnel who had tried to negotiate time off work for their AHED study at an FEI.

M-facing and C-facing professionals and spouses talked about Service spouses having to put their career plans on hold while supporting the careers of their Serving partners. Several spouses had talked specifically about having had to delay their decision to start an AHED course at an FEI while their partners were still in Service, due to their families' frequent relocations and/or regular long periods of lone parenting, with no family members nearby to help out with childcare needs.

My education has been put on hold since I was 18 because of my husband's Army career; I'm 43 now and have been waiting a long time. [ArmySp-MD/1]

I gave up my career, so he could have one. [NavySp-IN]

I lived in 29 houses... when I found out my husband was going to be medically discharged, then that was the time to try and do my Access course. [ArmySp-WIS]

Insights:

- Increased military workloads within a decreased military workforce appear to be impacting negatively on opportunities for Serving personnel to undertake personal adult learning, most notably for those from lower ranks and for those in the Army.
- Personnel Recovery Centres/Units have provided opportunities for WIS personnel to

undertake AHED study at local FEIs.

- Late timetabling of FEI AHED courses had impacted negatively on Serving personnel's negotiations with their Line Managers to study AHED at an FEI.
- Opportunities for Service spouses to study AHED at an FEI were limited by both frequent relocations as Service families and/or long periods that many faced as lone parents, when their Serving partner was away on military commitments.

3.3.2 STUDY FORMAT OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) COURSES

Many M-facing professionals suggested that distance learning AHED courses were the only real option available for most Serving personnel to consider, due to the limitations placed on personnel by their military commitments.

...the courses offered have to be very, very flexible. [IERO-2]

...if the opportunity had been there, even to do a distance course, I would definitely have considered doing my Access in Service. [RAFMD/1]

As the college don't offer any part-time or evening Access courses, I have thought about doing a distance learning Access course... [ArmySL]

One ex-Army personnel talked about their decision to undertake a distance learning AHED course, as a SL, because they were not able to get time off to attend the local FEI, although they said that their preference had been to do the course at the local FEI, because they felt it would have helped them prepare better for later HE study, as a civilian.

Some Access Co-ordinators talked about informal, blended learning approaches being increasingly adopted by AHED course providers, to accommodate the particular needs of Service spouses and Serving personnel, who had to relocate

part-way through their AHED course. However, it appeared that these AHED courses were not being formally promoted as a 'blended learning' model.

Access Co-ordinators and Service spouses suggested that more opportunities to undertake distance or blended learning AHED courses would be welcomed by adults with a Service background. Service spouses, in particular, talked about how more flexible AHED study options would help not only those who find they have to relocate during their studies and unable to transfer to a new FEI course, but would also help those Service spouses who struggle with childcare arrangements during their AHED studies. This applied in particular to those with pre-school age children and to those who found themselves lone parenting for extended periods due to their Serving partner's military commitments.

Several M-facing professionals and two potential AHED students appeared to be unclear about the distinction between the O.U. Access Module and distance learning AHED courses. They had suggested that they served the same function i.e. providing a non-traditional route to a brick university. However, O.U. Access modules, which are not regulated by the QAA, are only available to support those considering an O.U. degree.

Insights:

- Serving personnel and Service spouses all indicated that more flexible study options for AHED courses needed to be available to adults with a Service background and called for more opportunities to undertake distance and blended learning AHED courses.
- There appeared to be a level of misunderstanding within several members of the wider military community regarding the distinction between distance learning AHED courses and the O.U. Access modules.

3.3.3 FUNDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) AND DEGREE COURSE FEES

It was clear that neither M-facing nor C-facing C-IAG professionals were equipped to provide SLs with fully-informed IAG as to the civilian and military funding options available to pay for AHED and degree course fees.

I don't know enough about the statutory funding available for Access and university... [H4H-3]

C-facing C-IAG professionals indicated that they provided advice and guidance to potential AHED students as to the use of the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan, as the most appropriate vehicle for funding AHED course fees, on the basis that the AHED-funding element of the loan would be wiped out on completion of an HE course. Many talked about their lack of knowledge of the military funds for FE and HE, available to SLs up to 10 years post discharge. Most had been unaware of the Publicly-Funded Further Education / Higher Education (PF FE/HE) Scheme and that it offered eligible, ex-Service personnel (i.e. those who had served for more than 4 years or been medically discharged) a fee-free first level 3 or above qualification.

Almost all resettlement C-IAG professionals provided advice and guidance that centred on the use of Enhanced Learning Credits (ELCs) or the PF FE/HE Scheme as the funding option of choice for AHED and HE course fees. However, very few appeared to have been aware that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan could be used to provide a fee-free AHED course for those who progressed to complete an HE course.

My IERO didn't tell me that I could have used the 24+ loan to pay for my Access course, which would then have been written off when I got my degree. [ArmyMD/1]

Many ex-Service students talked about being poorly advised about how best to fund their AHED and HE course fees and be frustrated at not having found out about the 24+ loan and how it could have offered them an opportunity for a fee-free AHED course. Those that used their ELCs to fund their AHED course fees still had to make a personal contribution of at least 20%.

I partly funded my Access fees using my ELCs... which I wish I hadn't because now my fees won't all be paid off, when I complete my NHS-funded degree. [Army>6/6]

It would have been nice to know exactly what my entitlements were, in terms of student finance... It only became apparent that I could have applied for a 24+ loan halfway through my Access course – but I have already committed my first pot of ELCs... I wasn't aware of the 24+ loan then. [Army>6/2]

C-facing and M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel indicated that SLs had not necessarily been given the best advice regarding the funding options available to pay for AHED or degree course fees.

...why pay for things that are free... they need to use their resettlement money wisely. [FECA-3]

I wonder how useful ELCs are for Access courses because if they're eligible for the 24+ loan, they might as well use it because it'll be cleared if they progress. So I'd say to them... keep hold of your ELCs for something like a postgraduate qualification. [HEI]

I didn't have any mental health issues but like if you had PTSD and you thought I'm going to try and go into an Access course – and then you get bad news, like I did, that you'd have to pay for the fees yourself... that you've got to come up with £3,000... if you've got the world on your shoulders and then get told bad information... it just doesn't help, it shouldn't be allowed to happen... [MarineMD/1]

There appeared to be some ambiguity regarding the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) that resettlement C-IAG professionals provided about the PF FE/HE Scheme; some talked about it being available to fund fees for both AHED and degree courses, whereas others suggested that the scheme could only be used to pay for either AHED fees or degree fees, but not both.

What we have to explain to people is, if you go out and you use the FE/HE Scheme for an A level or equivalent, you can't then use it for a degree. It's either, or... The whole Scheme must be explained... because you're on it for 10 years after you leave. [IERO-1]

AHED sector professionals talked about the lack of any national promotion of the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan and that it was down to individual FEIs to promote it locally.

40% (n=20) of the past and current AHED students with a Serving background had used the 24+ loan for their AHED course fees; 25% had been advised to use their ELCs; 20% had paid completely out of personal funds; 5% used the PF FE/HE Scheme; 5% had their AHED fee paid for them as WIS personnel and 5% had undertaken the course before the introduction of AHED fees. Of the four potential AHED students with a Serving background, two were planning to use the PF FE/HE Scheme to pay for their AHED fees, one their ELCs and one the 24+ loan.

I advise them to get their Access course paid though the PF Scheme, if it's their first Level 3... [CTP-1]

Future Horizon Programme (FHP) Specialist Employment Consultants (SECs) described the largest barrier to Early Service Leaver (ESL) engagement with AHED as being the lack of funding for AHED, given that most of their ESL clients were under 24 and therefore not eligible to use the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan. From the 1st August 2016, a new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan is being introduced, to replace the 24+ loan, which will also

provide fee-free AHED courses for those who proceed to complete an HE course. This should widen the AHED market to those SLs under the age of 24 Years, who will predominantly be ESLs.

The 24+ loan is great but I've got a 22-year-old who wants to be a paramedic and do an Access course but he can't access any funding until he's 24... [FHP-1]

It's difficult for them to get onto Access courses and get funding... for our guys between 19 and 24... it's a struggle because once they're outside the apprenticeship scheme for free training, we have a void... so it's the challenge for them to build a career, it's easier just to take a job... The Access course would be perfect for many ESLs... if the funding was available to them. [FHP-3]

100% (n=9) of spouses who had undertaken their AHED course since the introduction of the 24+ loan had used this loan to pay for their AHED course fees. Of the four spouses who did their AHED course before the introduction of the 24+ loan three were self-funded and one had studied a free AHED course. All three spouses who were potential AHED students said that they were planning to use the 24+ loan to pay for their AHED fees.

One ex-Service personnel suggested that the conditions attached to the use of the 24+ loan for AHED fees (i.e. that the Access fee element of the 24+ loan is waived on completion of an HE course) provided a strong incentive to get on and complete a degree.

...it gives you that commitment because if you finish a degree, you don't pay that back. ...it's that little bit of a push I think. A motivator... [Navy>6]

Several ex-Service personnel talked about having been made aware of the PF FE/HE Scheme through their resettlement providers; ex-RAF students, in particular, suggested that the scheme had been widely promoted within the RAF.

I think there's a big push you know in the RAF, to make people aware of it. [RAFMD/3]

However, some M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel talked about the PF FE/HE Scheme as not having been well promoted to SLs.

...the FE/HE scheme is not really fully understood or communicated. [Army>6/2]

Four ex-Service personnel from across the Services, all of whom had left Service within the past four years, had not heard about the PF FE/HE Scheme.

...because I was a medical discharge... it was all quite abrupt... I'm not aware of the PF FE/HE Scheme. I've never heard of it. [RAFMD/1]

Several other ex-Service personnel talked about finding out about the PF FE/HE Scheme by chance.

They gave me the wrong information on how I should fund my Access course. They said I'll probably have to try and get charity money to pay for it... it was only by chance that I found out, just total random luck, that I didn't have to pay for the Access course fee...when I was talking to a mate and he said, oh no, you've got that wrong, that comes under the free degree thing... [MarineMD/1]

One of the guys on my H4H course with me, said... you know you can apply for your first degree for free because you've been medically discharged. No-one had ever said that to me... [MarineMD/2]

I learnt through second-hand information that the MOD will pay for your Access fees through the FE/HE scheme... [Army>6/2]

Both 2nd Line and 3rd Line resettlement professionals described a particular dichotomy within their posts; although their roles were described as retention positive, they were also remitted to promote the PF FE/HE Scheme, which was only available to ex-Service personnel. They felt that this free degree scheme did not help them to sell retention.

There are some really good offers out there... like the PF FE/HE Scheme... but very few people know about them... [UWO]

A few ex-Service personnel talked about the PF FE/HE Scheme as being quite complex to navigate; one medically-discharged personnel talked in particular, about their decision to pay for their AHED fees out of their medical insurance pay-out because they had found the administration of the PF FE/HE scheme too complex. However, M-facing professionals indicated that the scheme needed to have a robust application process in place, because it was public money.

...the free degree scheme is just such a hassle... on paper it looks great. But it was a nightmare... so I literally just got fed up with it and in the end said, you know what, I'll pay for it myself with my pension and my medical insurance... [NavyMD/1]

I know they'll pay for your first degree... but there are too many barriers put up, you can't do, you can't do it, you can't do it, you can't do it... it depends who is in the office at the time, it really does... It's highly bureaucratic... there must be an easier way. [RAF>6]

Several ex-Service personnel suggested that AHED should be promoted to SLs alongside promotion of the PF FE/HE scheme, as they felt it would open up the SL market to the PF FE/HE scheme - most notably to those SLs who had dismissed the free degree scheme, because they didn't have A-levels and assumed that HEI was not an option for them.

...they need to make it clear that you can have the option of doing a free degree, even when you don't have A levels... and be sure that you understand the offer of this FE/HE scheme. {Army>6/2}

The Education Centre had loads of advertisements about the free degree thing but... I'd never seen anything about the Access course. ...there are probably a lot of people out there thinking that they haven't got the qualifications to do a degree, so discard the free degree offer, you know, straight away... [RAFMD/3]

M-facing and C-facing professionals and many spouses talked about the adult education funding needs of Service spouses being overlooked, particularly for those spouses whose families were in resettlement and who wanted to use the opportunity of leaving Service life to develop their own careers. Both M-facing and C-facing professionals suggested that there should be bespoke funding support for Service spouses' adult education during the resettlement period, in acknowledgement of the sacrifices that many make with regard to their own career prospects while supporting the military careers of their partners.

...the most frequently asked question I have from spouses, about training and adult education, is to do with funding. ...we get asked, can we have access to those resettlement credits? [SFF]

...it would be helpful if their spouses could be classed as a special type of person who can access particular funding because of their military situation... and the sacrifices they make to their education and careers... [FECA-1]

Spouses talked about a lack of acknowledgement from the military for the commitments they had shown to the military, many having had to delay their own career plans until their partners were in resettlement.

...there were no funds to help spouses at college... yet I had given up my career so that he can have one... [NavySp-IN]

Several professionals and spouses said they would also like to see some resettlement support for Service spouses, or, at the very least, an opportunity for SLs to opt to have their resettlement package transferred to their spouse.

I don't know why the MOD won't allow the transfer of ELCs to the spouse, particularly if the spouse has to become the main breadwinner... but the transfer conditions are very narrow... I'd like to see it transferable in all cases... [H4H-3]

The NHS-funded degrees were found to be very popular with spouses. 73% (n=15) of the spouses interviewed were studying (or planning to study) an NHS-funded degree course; the remaining 27% were planning to pay for their degree fees using student loans. Many spouses had planned their career journey to nursing on the basis that, through the use of the 24+ loan for AHED and the free, NHS-funded degrees, they would enter their nursing career without any course fees to repay.

...our Access into nursing and healthcare professions is very popular, particularly with Service spouses... [Access-2]

21% (n=24) of the adults with a Serving background who were interviewed were studying, or were planning to study, an NHS-funded degree course. 42% (n=24) were using, or planning to use, the PF FE/HE Scheme to fund their HE course fees and 33% were using a student loan.

A couple of ex-Service personnel indicated that, although they had been aware of the PF FE/HE Scheme, they had not needed to use it because they had taken the opportunity of an NHS-funded degree. However, both referred to recent news that the NHS-funded degrees may be ceasing and suggested that SLs would then have to rely on the PF FE/HE Scheme to do fee-free health professional degrees.

...at least the free degree scheme thing is there, if the NHS funding does stop... [Army>6/6]

Clearly the withdrawal of NHS-funded degrees from 1 August 2017, has potential to impact greatly on Service spouses, many of whom talked about their decision to pursue a career in nursing, because they considered it a 'portable' career and therefore more suitable for the military life of a Service spouse.

...nursing is very popular with Service spouses. ... because you can take nursing with you when you move. [SFF]

Two ex-Service personnel described problems that they had encountered with their FEIs when they tried to arrange payment of their AHED fees using, in one case ELCs and, in the other, the PF FE/HE Scheme. They said that the FEIs had not been set up to process these military funds.

...it was all new to the college... they were surprised by the PF FE/HE funding... [MarineMD/1]

Although Access Co-ordinators were aware that the military provided funds to support SLs in FE and HE, none of the Access Co-ordinators were aware that their institutions needed to be registered with ELCAS as an 'Approved Provider' to enable students to use these military funds to pay for AHED course fees.

An Army SL and potential AHED student and an ex-Army, current AHED student, both talked about problems that they had encountered with HEIs in the discussions they had had about wanting to use the PF FE/HE Scheme to pay for their degree courses. In one case the HEI Admissions had not heard about the PF FE/HE Scheme and in the other case, the HEI was not yet registered as an ELCAS 'Approved Provider' to process fee payments through the scheme.

I phoned up the university and asked them about the Publicly Funded grant because I was planning on getting the ball rolling... but they had absolutely no idea what I was talking about... [ArmyMD/2]

I looked to see if the university's degree course was registered with ELCAS... but it wasn't listed. [ArmySL]

Insights relating to C-facing and M-facing organisations

- There appeared to be a lack of awareness and understanding by both M-facing and C-facing C-IAG providers with respect to the full range of civilian and military funding options available for AHED and HE course fees, suggesting that adults with a Serving background were not

necessarily getting access to fully-informed AHED-funding IAG. Specifically, there was a lack of awareness about the PF FE/HE Scheme amongst AHED sector professionals and a lack of awareness amongst M-facing C-IAG professionals that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan offered an opportunity for fee-free AHED courses to those who progressed to complete an HE course.

- The availability of the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan from August 2016, to replace the current 24+ loan, will open up opportunities to those Service Leavers under the age of 24 years, who would likely be ESLs, to undertake fee-free AHED courses, subject to their progression to completion of an HE course, as with the current 24+ loan.

Insights relating to C-facing organisations

- It appeared that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan was not promoted nationally, rather it was the responsibility of individual FEIs to promote it locally.
- None of the Access Co-ordinators appeared to be aware that their institutions needed to ensure that they were registered with ELCAS as an 'Approved Provider', to enable Serving and ex-Service personnel to use their military funds to pay for their course fees.

Insights relating to M-facing organisations

- There appeared to be a lack of clarity amongst resettlement C-IAG professionals as to whether the PF FE/HE Scheme could be used for either AHED or HE course fees, or whether it could be used for to pay course fees for both AHED and HE courses.
- There was a dichotomy for resettlement C-IAG providers, in that they had a duty to be retention positive (i.e. encourage, where

appropriate, personnel to remain in Service), but at the same time they had a role in promoting the PF FE/HE Scheme, which is only available to those who have left Service. They suggested that the availability of the PF FE/HE Scheme made it hard for them to sell retention.

- Not all ex-Service personnel who had left Service within the past four years had been aware of the PF FE/HE Scheme.
- The administration process for the PF FE/HE Scheme was considered by some to be highly bureaucratic; however, it was acknowledged that it needed to be a robust application process, because it was public money.
- Joint promotion of the PF FE/HE Scheme and AHED could widen participation in the PF FE/HE Scheme to those who had dismissed (on the basis that they did not have any A-levels) the opportunity it offered for a fee-free degree.
- Joint promotion of the PF FE/HE Scheme and the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan to SLs would increase awareness of the fact that they could study for an AHED and a degree course, both free from tuition fees.
- Calls were made by M-facing and C-facing professionals and by spouses, for Service spouses to either have their own resettlement support package from the MOD or, at the very least, for SLs to have an opportunity to transfer their own resettlement support to their Service spouse, many of whom have had their career prospects thwarted by their commitments to a Service family life.

3.3.4 LIVING COSTS FOR ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) STUDY

Many professionals and ex-Service personnel said that funding AHED course fees was not an issue for most SLs; the biggest concern for many was how

would they fund their living costs while an AHED student. This appeared to be particularly important for those who had a family to support and/or where their spouse was either unemployed, or under-employed.

Although suggestions were made that Service charities may be able to help out with living costs at FE, several M-facing professionals and adults with a Service background talked about the challenges they had faced in trying to identify the appropriate Service charities, out of the many that exist.

I think there are plenty that would like to go to university but it's just their financial circumstances that mean it's not easy for them to. [CTP-3]

A couple of C-facing professionals gave examples of cases where there had been a lack of understanding about how the 24+ loan could be used by AHED students, with some clients having been under the mistaken belief that it could also be used to fund their living costs whilst an AHED student.

The problem is they sell the 24+ loan as a student loan, so people say - Oh great that'll pay for my living expenses but it only covers Access tuition fees. We've had a few apoplectic people who've left work not knowing they couldn't get support for their living expenses... [FECA-2]

Insights:

- The biggest concern for most SLs was not so much the funding of an AHED course but rather, how would they fund their living costs while an AHED student, a particular concern for those with family responsibilities and/or those whose spouse was either unemployed, or under-employed.
- It appeared that there was a lack of awareness that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan could only be used to support AHED course fees and not to support living costs while an AHED student.
- Although some suggestions were made that

the Service charities sector may be able to support AHED student living costs, navigating the Service charities sector was found to be challenging for those seeking to identify charities that offer support for adult education.

3.3.5 CURRENCY OF MILITARY QUALIFICATIONS

M-facing and C-facing C-IAG providers and ex-Service personnel identified, as a particular issue, the fact that many SLs and ex-Service personnel had not had their military qualifications recognised by HEIs.

There's a gap between our military achievement and the equivalent in civilian qualifications. [Army>6/1]

...in terms of going to university... my military qualifications are no benefit whatsoever... [Army>6/2]

I've got hundreds of qualifications through the Service... I thought I'd be OK but I can't use them outside. [Navy4-6]

...we were always led to believe that the qualifications that we gained in the Army would just translate straight to civilian when we left, it was only after I left that I realised that it wasn't true... I found out when I went to apply for university... That was a shock. [Army4-6/2]

Many M-facing professionals suggested that AHED was not always appropriate for those SLs who sought recognition of their military qualifications by HEIs for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL). They also talked about SLs not taking the opportunity available to them to get some of their military qualifications mapped to the NQF.

...a lot of them have a lot of management and leadership experience but no qualification to show for it... the mapping of their military qualifications should be happening throughout their career... we advise them that if there is accreditation there, they should be... doing it prior to resettlement. ... because we don't have access to the accreditation for

skills matrix because we don't have access to MOD systems... [CTP-1]

Traditionally the military have been poor at giving out civilian qualifications but they are getting better... but still, a lot of Service personnel don't bother getting the civilian certificate... [CTP-3]

...I worry about military courses... they're missing one thing and that is... unless you pay to get them accredited by an NVQ or something similar, to turn it into a civilian qualification... it's unfair because if I were a civilian and I were doing all these extra courses, I would constantly be becoming more and more employable... [UWO]

...it would be really interesting to know how many soldiers actually get on and get the civilian qualifications... because the process is such a pain... [Army>6/1]

I feel like we're given just enough qualifications to do the military job but not enough for them to be of use outside... we are skilled but we just don't have the qualifications to prove it. [ArmyWIS]

Resettlement C-IAG professionals talked about advising those SLs who had expressed an interest in HE to enquire of HEI Admissions about all the non-traditional routes to HE that are available to them. C-facing professionals, too, suggested that AHED was not always the most appropriate option for SLs and that all non-traditional routes into HE should be considered.

...if somebody has high levels of professional military qualifications, I think they are entitled to have them looked at properly and systematically and measured against either HE entry qualifications or qualifications at degree level. The universities need educating about the skills and subject content of military qualifications... That's how you are going to widen participation. [HE]

Both M-facing and C-facing professionals suggested that opportunities to facilitate an improved

understanding between HEIs and the military, with respect to the skills and subject content of military qualifications, would enable more SLs to enter HE through APL, and thus avoid the additional year required to secure an AHED.

...maybe there should be a glossary available... so universities can learn more about what specific military skills include... [H4H-3]

...it's not necessarily about us having our skills transferred; maybe it's almost as much that the civilian sector needs to understand what our skills mean to them. We need a two-way education process... and somebody needs to drive that process... [UWO]

An example was given by a C-facing C-IAG provider, of a collaborative relationship between an HEI and local military professionals that became strained and eventually broke down due, they felt in large part, to the lack of preparedness of the HEI to accept APL and/or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) for their SLs.

...what is a very sensitive area for the military is the fact that they've already worked really hard on very specific military qualifications but unfortunately they're not always recognised by universities, that's the biggest challenge. ...and there appears to be nothing happening to address it and it's quite frustrating... it's something that's rumbled on for years and years and years. [HE]

A related issue was also raised by many ex-Service personnel and M-facing professionals about what, in their opinion, was a lack of opportunity for SLs to get their military qualifications easily mapped to the NQF. Although the Army had introduced 'The Army Skills Offer', offering Army personnel an opportunity to have one of their military qualifications mapped for free, to a civilian equivalent, a concern (raised by several ex-Service personnel) was that they didn't necessarily have enough information to know which one of their

military qualifications they should select to be mapped.

CTP C-IAG professionals indicated that this mapping process needed to be completed by the military, prior to discharge; it was not something that CTP was able to facilitate.

Insights:

- SLs were frustrated to find their military qualifications had no currency as APL, for entry on to an HE course.
- The suggestion appeared to be that the responsibility for getting military qualifications accepted as APL for entry into HE lay jointly with the military and the HE sector and that more needed to be done to improve understanding within the HE sector, with respect to the subject and skills content of military qualifications, to avoid SLs from having to choose the AHED route unnecessarily.
- Personnel are at risk of leaving Service without having had any of their military qualifications mapped to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

3.3.6 GCSE REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Many C-IAG professionals and ex-Army interviewees talked about Army personnel often leaving Service with the mistaken belief that their Level 2 Functional Skills in Literacy and Numeracy equated to Level 2 GCSEs in English and Maths. This had proved to be a particular problem for those from the Army who wanted to do a degree course through the AHED route because recent developments within the AHED field meant that many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) now required AHED students to enter their HEI with GCSEs in English and Maths and (in some cases) Science, too.

...we have a slight problem in the Army, or we have

had, in that we do Functional Skills in literacy and sell it to soldiers as – Oh, this equates to a GCSE in English and Maths... but it doesn't... [IERO-1]

I do explain to them that Level 2 Functional Skills in literacy and numeracy is not the same as GCSE English and Maths... but their understanding is limited because they've assumed they're both Level 2... [CTP-1]

...if they find that they need to get their GCSEs... and they're in their last six months of Service, it kind of promotes panic... it's another hurdle... [CTP-4]

I interviewed a Service Leaver recently who had no idea that her Functional Skills wouldn't be enough... [Access-3]

The Army should ensure soldiers focus on getting their GCSEs in English and Maths... if I knew how essential they were for any environment – it's actually a Government target as well – I would have done them in Service and wouldn't be in the predicament of having to do my Maths GCSEs too. [Army>6/2]

A Co-ordinator of a Community Learning Centre, located adjacent to an Army base, talked about the Army's fixation on Functional Skills, which meant that Functional Skills had become the focus of the centre's provision. However, they suggested that if they started to promote local AHED courses, together with information about necessary GCSEs, it could increase local demand for GCSEs in English and Maths, which the centre could then deliver.

Some FEIs talked about having provided pre-AHED courses to enable students to secure any necessary GCSEs before the start of the AHED course; others had allowed AHED students to study GCSEs alongside the AHED course. However, many Access Co-ordinators and many students described the extra stress that they found themselves under, from having to study both AHED and GCSEs in parallel.

I was frightened to death of having to do my GCSEs as well as my Access... it was hard... it was a nightmare... and I was in a class of 16 year olds... [Army>6/1]

AHED Co-ordinators felt that this additional pressure with GCSEs was linked to AHED students dropping out of their courses.

I'd say about 50% dropped out because they were doing GCSEs and their Access course at the same time... and it's really tough, really tough... [Access-3]

36% (n=22) of the ex-Service personnel interviewed did not have the necessary facilitating GCSEs in English and/or Maths to secure entry to HE with their AHED; 88% (n=8) of these were ex-Army and 12% were ex-Marine. Many had to secure their GCSEs through parallel study alongside their AHED course and described their experiences as having been very stressful.

Several ex-Army personnel suggested that, had they been made aware of AHED during Service and the limitations of their Level 2 Functional Skills, they would have made more effort to have secured GCSEs in English and Maths, whilst in Service.

...knowing what I now know, I'd probably have made more of an effort at the time to get the GCSEs in the Army. [Army>6/1]

A medically discharged Marine talked about doing his English GCSE whilst Wounded, Injured or Sick (WIS) in a Personnel Recovery Unit (PRU), describing his motive as being to occupy his time; only later, after deciding to do an AHED course, had he realised how useful it had proved to be. He said that his only regret was not also having done his GCSE Maths at the same time, because he then found himself having to study it alongside his AHED course. He had not been made aware of AHED until after he had been medically discharged.

53% (n=15) of the spouses interviewed had not had the necessary GCSEs in English or Maths so many had to face the additional pressure of undertaking GCSE studies alongside their AHED courses.

One Army spouse described how, after completing her Level 2 Functional Skills within a Service Education Centre, they had been advised by their tutor against doing GCSEs in English and Maths, but instead was advised to concentrate on a level 3 course. This resulted in this student having to study GCSEs in English and Maths at the same time as their AHED study.

The majority of M-facing C-IAG professionals had not been aware of the requirements by many HEIs for AHED students to also have secured their English and Maths GCSEs.

Access Co-ordinators and FEI CAs talked about how they had found it challenging trying to keep abreast of individual HEI requirements for GCSEs for AHED students, to ensure that they were advising their prospective AHED students accurately.

One H4H CA talked about a recent case of a client who wanted to do an AHED course and who was told by an HEI that their GCSEs were too old to be accepted, indicating, yet further, how difficult it can be to keep abreast of the requirements of individual HEIs for entrance to their degree courses through AHED.

...the currency of your GCSEs, it's at the discretion of the HEI provider and it just keeps changing. It's really difficult to keep abreast. [H4H-2]

The Access offers are changing continually... literally on a weekly basis... it's extremely problematic for us... [Access-3]

Not all universities are saying that you have to have your GCSEs in Maths and English. ...there are some that will consider your experience and things like that and be more flexible... [FECA-1]

Insights relating to C-facing organisations:

- Access Co-ordinators and FEI Careers Advisers

were finding it challenging trying to keep abreast of the changing demands from the HE sector with regard to GCSE requirements for AHED students.

Insights relating to M-facing organisations:

- Army personnel appeared to be at risk of leaving Service under the mistaken belief that their Level 2 Functional Skills in Literacy and numeracy were equivalent to Level 2 GCSEs in English and Maths.
- The majority of M-facing C-IAG professionals were unaware of the recent changes within the AHED sector, whereby many HEIs now required AHED students to have GCSEs in English and Maths and (for some degree courses) Science, too.
- Over a third of ex-Service personnel had left Service without the necessary GCSEs they required for HE via AHED, the vast majority being from the Army.
- Over half of the spouses did not have the necessary GCSEs that they required for HE via AHED.
- AHED students who needed to secure GCSEs were either offered the opportunity of securing them through a pre-Access course at an FEI, or studying them alongside their AHED.
- Studying GCSEs in parallel with AHED study was described by both students and AHED Co-ordinators as very stressful and possibly linked to student drop-outs from AHED courses.
- Ensuring that Serving personnel are not only aware of AHED whilst in Service, but are also aware of the new, additional requirements by many HEIs for GCSEs, may encourage them, particularly SLs, to plan and prepare more effectively; enabling them to secure these necessary GCSEs whilst Serving (thus avoiding

the additional pressure faced by those who had to secure their GCSEs post-discharge).

3.3.7 RELOCATION WITHIN SERVICE

Relocation within Service during AHED studies, was a particular concern raised by spouses and Access Co-ordinators.

Access Co-ordinators talked about there being very few opportunities available for mid-AHED course transfers to a new FEI and described cases whereby Service spouses had to abandon their AHED studies because their Serving partners had been relocated.

Service spouses talked about difficult decisions that they had to make, when weighing up the pros and cons of living separately from their relocated Serving partner, when aiming to provide continuity for their AHED studies. Although living unaccompanied offered them stability during their AHED course, those with children then found that they had to cope with additional childcare pressures while studying for much of the time as a lone parent.

Many spouses talked about decisions they had had to take to delay the start of their AHED course because they could not guarantee that their Serving partner would not be relocated during their study period, requiring them to move out of their Service Family Accommodation (SFA).

One Service spouse talked about their frustration at not having been allowed to remain in their SFA to complete an AHED course. Another Service spouse described how they had only found out by chance that they could apply to remain in SFA. This issue has been addressed, after campaigning by the Service Family Federations. Now, under circumstances where a Serving partner is unexpectedly relocated part-way through their spouse's adult education course, Service spouses can apply to remain in their SFA until the end of their course.

One RAF spouse, who was a potential AHED student, talked about her experience of having started a nursing degree in the UK a few years ago, but had to abandon it part-way through her 2nd year, when their spouse was relocated abroad. When they returned to the UK six years later, with the intention of picking up degree studies again, they were told by the HEI that they needed to be able to demonstrate that they had undertaken academic study within the past five years before the HEI would even consider an application. Having been abroad for over six years, they were not able to provide this evidence. They were then advised by the HEI to do an AHED course.

...because we did more than five years overseas, I've got to go all the way back to the beginning, do an Access course because I've got to prove my recent study... because the military posted us overseas... I lost everything. [RAFSp-IN/5]

Another Service spouse talked about plans that they had had to start an AHED course on their return from a posting to Germany, only to find that the HEI would not hold a place open because they were unable to provide them with confirmation of a UK address.

Unfortunately, I haven't been able to get to university yet... the limitations of our lifestyle... it's very, very difficult for me to know where we are going to be living... at the moment, going to university is unworkable... [ArmySp-IN/3]

...it would be really helpful if there was some understanding by the universities that, through no fault of our own, you may not be able to find a university place within the time limit of your Access qualification. [ArmySp-WIS]

A few ex-Army personnel talked about how relocations within the Army impacted negatively on their opportunities to commit to an AHED course at an HEI.

...what the Army has consistently failed to do is ensure that the soldier has a more stable location. ...The RAF are very, very fixed... but soldiers are posted every two to three years. ...that makes it difficult to attend a college. [Army>6/2]

AHED sector professionals and spouse interviewees talked about problems that Service spouses had encountered when completing their UCAS application at the start of their AHED studies. Many Serving spouses, particularly Army spouses, did not know where they would be relocated to in 2-3 years' time and, as such, had to take a best guess with respect to their HEI options on their UCAS application.

One problem that Service spouses have is they're very restricted to where they can apply to university. I've got someone I saw last week, who – to this day – doesn't know whether her husband is going to be relocated. They've applied to five universities, based on a best guess of where they might be stationed next... that's impossible to plan for... [FECA-2]

I'm absolutely clueless when it comes to having to make my university choices or what would happen if I have to move... You know, it's really hard. [RAFSp-IN/3]

Spouses also talked about being reluctant to discuss their relocation concerns with HEI Admissions, in the belief that their lack of certainty about being able to take up a degree offer may impact negatively on their UCAS application.

I didn't want to have that conversation with the university about the possibility of having to relocate because I thought it would lessen my chances of getting in. [RAFSp-IN/1]

A further negative consequence of relocation for Service spouses undertaking AHED courses, related to those who, due to high mobility within the military, found that they had been unable to progress to an HE course within five years of completion of their AHED course.

As a consequence, Service spouses can find that their AHED qualification lacks currency with HEIs, who usually require evidence of recent study within a past 5-year period. This would have financial implications for those Service spouses who had used a 24+ loan to pay for their AHED course fees, as the 24+ loan is only waived on completion of an HE course.

Insights:

- There appeared to be very few opportunities for mid-AHED course transfers to another FEI, because AHED courses were quite bespoke to individual FEIs.
- Relocation within a Service impacted negatively on AHED students who were both Serving personnel and Service spouses, with some having to abandon their AHED studies as a consequence.
- Although Service spouses can now apply to remain in their SFA to complete their studies, if their Serving partner is unexpectedly relocated during the duration of their course, spouses described the dilemma of having to choose either to abandon their AHED studies, or to live as a lone parent, with the additional pressures it placed on them, whilst an AHED student.
- One particular negative impact of relocation for Service spouses, which appeared to be a particular issue for highly mobile, Army spouses, related to the completion of their UCAS application. Those who had no idea where their Service family would be living in 2 to 3 years' time had to make a best guess on their UCAS application. Service spouses also talked about their reluctance to discuss this dilemma with HEIs, in case it jeopardised their application.
- There are financial implications for those Service spouses who, due to high mobility, find that they are unable to progress to an HE course within 5 years of securing their AHED qualification, because they would not then get their 24+ Advanced Learner Loan waived.

3.3.8 LEARNING SUPPORT AT FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (FEIs)

Access Co-ordinators identified a range of student support needs that were presented by some students with a Serving background, including:

- Problems adjusting to the less disciplined FE environment;
- Mental health issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which some ex-Service personnel indicated could be both diagnosed and undiagnosed;
- Dyslexia; and
- Out-of-date ICT skills

Two interviewees, one current WIS Army personnel and the other ex-Army, talked about their dyslexia and referred to many of their Serving and ex-Service Army colleagues who were also dyslexic.

Several ex-Army students talked specifically about coping with mental health issues during their AHED studies. Although they said that they had appreciated the support they received from their FEI, they felt that it was only fair to the FEI staff themselves that they receive some training to support students with PTSD. Suggestions were made that Service charities, such as H4H or Combat Stress, could have a role to play here.

Colleges and universities need to be more aware of the process that a Service Leaver goes through when leaving the Forces. ...veterans may have mental health issues, some may not even be aware of it.. and many find it difficult to ask for help and support. I did... when I started to suffer from mental health problems... [Army4-6/1]

I was medically discharged from the military in 2013 with PTSD and a few mental health issues... I didn't find there was much help available for me once I kind of left. ...being open with people and explaining to them about my mental health issues... That's very difficult. [ArmyMD/2]

I'm quite a complex case because of my PTSD, because of my hearing and because of my dyslexia... I would guess that more people in the Army have dyslexia than don't, they're just not aware of it. My dyslexia wasn't really supported by the Army, but I guess it didn't really need to be supported a lot for my job in the Army. [ArmyMD/1]

One Access Co-ordinator described some challenging situations that they had experienced during AHED lessons with a few ex-Service personnel who had mental health problems. They suggested that FEI staff needed to receive training to enable them to best support any students who presented with PTSD, or other mental health issues.

...we've had some quite difficult sessions with some very, very upset people who've recently Served... there were some specific triggers that hadn't been disclosed at the beginning of the year... our staff need to be trained on some of these mental health difficulties, so we can support the student... [Access-3]

Insights:

- A range of specific support needs were identified for some ex-Service personnel. These included support for dyslexia and those coping with mental health issues, including PTSD, which some ex-Service personnel suggested may be diagnosed, or undiagnosed.
- Access Co-ordinators and ex-Service AHED students with PTSD suggested that bespoke training for FEI staff on PTSD would benefit both the student with PTSD and FEI support staff.

3.3.9 CHILDCARE

Although Access Co-ordinators and spouses talked about AHED course timetables being designed to accommodate the needs of students with school-age children, several students and Access Co-ordinators suggested that the late timetabling

of AHED courses was often problematic for those Service spouses who needed to confirm childcare arrangements for their pre-school age children.

C-facing professionals and spouses talked about access to quality, affordable childcare, as being one of the biggest challenges that Service spouses faced as AHED students. It was said to be particularly difficult for those Service spouses who found themselves needing additional childcare to support extended periods of lone parenting, when their Serving partner was away on military commitments, with many, particularly Army spouses, having no family nearby, to help out with their childcare needs.

I know from our Early Years and Childcare Team, there's a huge lack of childcare in the area... it's certainly a problem... [LEP]

...if a spouse's partner earns over 21K, they can't get bursaries and things like that to help them out with extra childcare when their partner is away... and most don't have any local support from family members to help them... [FECA-1]

...the biggest thing that really differs us from civilians, in my opinion, is the fact that we just have to take the hit when our partners go away for six months. ...you have to become everything... and trying to study as well... [NavySp-IN]

I am worried that because I'm also a Service spouse, I may find myself unaccompanied... if he gets posted away, the fact that I'd have to sort of try and juggle the course with four kids on my own, might be a bit of a challenge... we don't have any family nearby to help out... [ArmySL]

Two RAF spouses talked about support that their family had received from their Serving partner's line manager, who had responded to the families' childcare needs by offering the Serving partner some flexibility around their working day. However, both RAF spouses suggested that this opportunity

was likely only available to them because their partners were higher ranking Officers, who they suggested had more negotiating powers than those from the lower ranks.

...the nursery wasn't very flexible... that was a struggle... I was missing quite a fair bit of college. ... so my husband spoke to work, who said to him... I'll allow you to take the children and pick them up... The RAF to be honest were really, really helpful. [RAFSp-IN/3]

Insights relating to C-facing organisations

- Although AHED course timetables are designed to accommodate the needs of families with school-age children, those AHED students, usually Service spouses, who needed to arrange childcare for their pre-school children, found that the late timetabling of AHED courses impacted negatively on their ability to confirm childcare arrangements. This proved to be particularly problematic in an environment where affordable, quality childcare was considered to be limited.

Insights relating to M-facing organisations

- Service spouses found themselves coping with the additional pressure of extended periods of lone-parenting whilst an AHED student, with many, particularly Army spouses, having no local family network from which to draw support and limited access to affordable, quality childcare options.
- There was evidence that within the RAF, line managers had been more supportive of their Service personnel's need to increase their childcare responsibility when their spouse was an AHED student, having offered some flexibility to the Serving partner's working patterns to accommodate the family's childcare needs. However, it appeared that this support may be more readily available to those from higher ranks.

3.3.10 TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Several C-facing C-IAG professionals talked about the opportunity that AHED courses had appeared to provide to some SLs in supporting their transition journey from a military to civilian life. One suggested that AHED courses provided an 'airlock', a structured space that allowed SLs to assimilate the challenging, cultural shift that many experienced, upon discharge.

...transition is massive... the cultural shift, that's the biggest thing... maybe Access courses need promoting to the military as a structured provision to support this cultural shift in transition. ...if they want a logical beginning, middle and end, it does exactly what it says on the tin. ...I think sometimes people see Access as a bit of a touchy, feely kind of thing, which it isn't, and if it was promoted to these guys, particularly the men, in a different way, I think we'll get much more buy-in. [HE]

... getting SLs to think in a non-military way can be quite challenging for them. ...they can find some subjects, like sociology, quite challenging, you know, sort of having to think in a much more flexible way... [Access-1]

I think one of the real opportunities from better communication between colleges and the Armed Forces... is the way Access courses can support resettlement... I hear back from such students and they say how it helped them and gave them much greater confidence. [Access-1]

I couldn't do Access at college whilst still in the Army, there just wasn't time... so a distance course was the only way that I could manage to get it done... but because it was distance... it wasn't sort of civilianising me in any way. [Army>6/6]

As the college don't offer any part-time or evening Access courses, I have thought about doing a distance learning Access course... though I'd rather not do a distance course because I like the idea of going somewhere, of interfacing with civilians... of having that discipline and structure. [ArmySL]

Ex-Service personnel talked about a range of challenges that they experienced after leaving Service, particularly in relation to feeling they had become institutionalised by their Service experience, many having described feelings of loss and isolation.

You're so in your little bubble in the military... when you come out, you haven't got a clue about anything... it took me five years to really get used to being a civilian. No structure... being on my tod didn't help at all... once you're bored, you've had it. ...I'd say if you're looking at doing an Access course, get on it as quickly as you possible can because it will keep you motivated, keep you going. If I'd done this course straight from the Navy, I wouldn't have struggled so much adapting to be a civilian...[Navy4-6]

When I left I broke up with my Mrs, I moved out and was living out of the back of a van, I used to sleep there and washed in McDonalds... I phoned a couple of charities but they said they couldn't help me...I was struggling to adapt to the civilian world and ended up losing my job. ...I think a lot more needs to be done for the militarising in your head. ...without mass civilian exposure, it's really hard to get the military out of your head. [Army>6/4]

...once you're discharged, it severs all the ties... You do feel alone because you've gone from this massive network... they do everything for you too... it's just not that simple when you go into the civilian thing. [ArmyMD/4]

I'd been institutionalised really from the age of 16 and I was absolutely hopeless. ...I ended up breaking up from my wife... I've had terrible financial bad troubles since I left the Army... [Army>6/3]

They also described how their experiences as AHED students had helped them overcome some of these challenges. Several talked about how the structured AHED course, with a civilian peer group, had provided valuable support to them during their immediate, post-discharge period.

I was lucky; my Access course took me seamlessly from my military life back into the civilian world. ... being in a structured environment with civilians is definitely important coz a big part of military life is structure... [ArmyMD/3]

...the Access course for me was a case of deprogramming the Army and reprogramming the civvy... [ArmyMD/1]

My Access course is probably the most I've had to deal with civvies... being with a lot of different backgrounds... Army>6/4]

...by doing the Access course... I had structure to my life. And I think that was important... I didn't want to just leave because I know a lot of people struggle... [RAF>6]

...my Access course gave me a focus, rather than coming out and then looking up to the sky and going 'what do I do now?' [Army>6/3]

I'd been wrapped up in the Army for so long... doing the Access was a massive learning curve, not just sort of academically, it was me being reintegrated back in to civilian life, if you like... it was a positive experience. ...I'd have never thought someone like me would go to college... with my background... [ArmyMD/4]

All Access students are transitioning in one way or another... Access opens doors; it has for me... it's a stepping stone... I think it's great and should be pushed more in the military. [MarineMD/2]

One ex-Service personnel talked about their regret at having done a distance learning AHED course because they felt that they had missed out on the positive transition experience gained from being an AHED student in the FEI environment.

...because it was a distance course... it wasn't sort of civilianising me in any way. [Army>6/6]

Many medically-discharged personnel talked about how their experience as an AHED student had helped them to rebuild their confidence. Two ex-Army personnel talked in detail about how they felt that their AHED course experience had helped them cope with their mental health problems, providing them with a constructive distraction, within the structure of the FEI environment.

...because my plans to get on the rigs failed, I hit a new low... then I started thinking I don't need the money, so I started thinking about a career that I would like... this Access is a real good thing for me... They almost need to make the Access course for that sort of thing, for helping us in transitions. [MarineMD/1]

I was convalescing at home and I wanted to fill the time in a productive manner, so I requested to go to college to do my Access course, while I was recovering...I was suffering from post-traumatic stress at the time and I was struggling with sort of life, really, so it was good that I could worry about a physics exam instead of worrying about other things... it was a good distraction tool. ...you also build relationships and realise that you're not the only one with problems, so you start to look at life a bit differently. [ArmyMD/4]

I'm a complex case because of my PTSD, because of my hearing, because of my dyslexia... But going to college really helped me... [ArmyMD/1]

An Army WIS soldier, who was a potential AHED student, talked about his fear of ending up like some of his ex-Service colleagues, who he witnessed failing to cope with their transition back into the civilian world. He talked about wanting to do an AHED course, while WIS, so that he could be better prepared for a successful transition.

I'm on long-term sick and I've got more surgery to come...and I'm realising that in the next couple of months, they will say sorry, your Service is no longer required and I'm thinking where's all my skills so that I can go out into the world...I am thinking of

doing an Access course... to stop this panic button in my head... I need to prepare for my likely medical discharge... [ArmyWIS]

Several ex-Service students said that, had they known about AHED when in Service, they could have made plans to start their course as soon as possible after discharge and have avoided what many described as the challenging void and problems they faced in the period following their discharge.

My Access course stopped my boredom, that is a massive thing... it maintained my focus. ...when I left the Navy I was sitting around doing nothing and – depression is a bit steep but you start to think where am I going and become really unmotivated... I felt like a waster... Had I left the Navy and started straight on an Access course... it wouldn't have given me a chance to be bored... I really needed to have known about it before I came out... [Navy>6]

The overwhelming opinion from ex-Service personnel was how their AHED course had played a pivotal role on their journey to achieve their ambitions, providing them with an opportunity to have fulfilling, post military careers.

I'd always wanted to be a lawyer but I thought my dream was over. But here I am now, in the second year of my law degree... [ArmyMD/3]

Without it I wouldn't have achieved my career ambition... [NavyMD/2]

Spouses talked about how their AHED course had helped their family's transition, by enabling them to find a career and support the family's income in transition.

Several M-facing professionals and spouses talked about an increasing number of spouses finding themselves in a position of either having to become the main earner, after their Serving partner was medically discharged, or needing to support their post-Service household's dual income needs.

We get more and more wives coming to us, saying my husband's had to leave the Forces because of his PTSD and now I need to get a job... [RFS]

...my decision to do the Access course was triggered by my husband's injury... because he has PTSD... and had got worse since leaving the Army... I thought that if [X] couldn't earn, I would always be able to cover it... I had to start thinking about a different future after he was injured... [ArmySp-MD/2]

Several M-facing professionals and spouses talked about more successful transitions for those families where the spouse was successfully employed.

...in order to have a really successful transition, it's going to have less of an impact on society if the non-Serving spouse can get into employment easily, then you're halfway there... if you're owning your own property as well, you're no longer in this military bubble... it's going to be so much easier for the whole family to transition to civilian life. [SFF]

...most Serving families need a dual income... the extra salary is no longer nice to have, it's a necessity for many... economically, it makes sense to get spouses working... [RFS]

If I do my Access course and then get a nursing degree... I'll be able to earn good money rather than average money... [ArmySp-IN/2]

...my Access got me into university, so when he does finally leave, at least one of us will be on a steady good wage until he decides what he wants to do. [RAFSp-IN/1]

Insights:

- The AHED course can set many ex-Service personnel on a path to a fulfilling, post military career.
- Ex-Service personnel face a range of challenges after leaving, what several referred to as, their 'military bubble', with particular reference made by some to feelings of loss, isolation and having been institutionalised.
- Ex-Service personnel talked about their experiences on structured AHED courses, within peer groups of civilians, as having helped them cope with the social and cultural challenges that many of them faced post discharge. Many of those who had been medically discharged talked about how their AHED experiences had helped them to better cope with their mental health issues and re-build their confidence.
- There were suggestions from ex-Service personnel that, had they been made aware of AHED before they were discharged, they would have aimed to start their course as soon as possible after leaving Service, in the belief that doing so would have helped them to avoid the isolation and associated problems that many had experienced immediately post-discharge.
- AHED courses also had a pivotal impact for those spouses seeking fulfilling careers, enabling them to support the household income in transition; particularly important to spouses of medically discharged personnel whose partners may struggle to find post-military employment or careers, due to the nature of their medical discharge.

4. Conclusion and recommendations



This research set out to illuminate whether there are particular factors that adults with a Service background face that can present as barriers on their journey to and through AHED. Conclusions are grouped under three themes: (i) Profile of AHED students with a Service background; (ii) Factors impacting on knowledge of AHED and (iii) Factors impacting on engagement with AHED.

Within two of these themes a range of categories have been identified. The research recommendations aim to address the potential barriers identified according, where relevant, to each such category in turn.

4.1 PROFILE OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) STUDENTS WITH A SERVICE BACKGROUND

Although the project's recruitment was also aimed at Early Service Leavers (ESL) none were recruited to the study. This may be attributable to the fact that ESLs i.e. those who have Served for less than 4 years, do not have access to any military funds to support their FE or HE aspirations, unlike those who have served for more than four years. Additionally, any ESLs under the age of 24 years, which previous research [Fossey, 2013] indicates represents a large proportion of ESLs, would not have been eligible for the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan to fund their AHED course fees.

Low representation amongst AHED students by dependant adult children may also be linked to the fact that the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan is not available to those aged 19-23 years, which is also likely to include the majority of this particular cohort. However, the introduction of the 19+ Advanced Learner Loan in August 2016 will undoubtedly open up opportunities to increase the AHED market

to those ESLs and dependant adult children aged between 19 and 23 years. As such, AHED course providers and M-facing C-IAG professionals should consider these particular cohorts in any publicity or marketing campaigns aimed at increasing recruitment of AHED students with a Service background.

Evidence indicates that the majority of Service Leavers (SLs) are from the Army [Forces in Mind Trust, 2013] with about a third being discharged as ESLs because they fail to complete basic training [Ashcroft, 2014]; many Army recruits come from a low socio-economic background and nearly half have literacy and numeracy levels equivalent to an 11-year old [College of St George, 2014].

The findings from this research project indicate that the majority of the ex-Service AHED student interviewees were from the non-commissioned ranks of the Army, at Lance Corporal equivalent or below, the smallest cohort being ex-RAF personnel. This high representation from the Army may also be linked to other findings in this research that suggest that Army personnel, particularly those from the lower ranks, have the least opportunity to undertake FE, or HE, whilst in Service and so have to wait until they have been discharged to pursue adult education opportunities.

Almost half of the ex-Service interviewees had been medically discharged, with no dominant representation from any of the Services. Medically discharged personnel, regardless of their length of Service, together with those who have served for more than 6 years, have access to full C-IAG resettlement support, as well as military funds to support their FE and HE aspirations during resettlement; this provides increased opportunities for these cohorts to consider AHED study.

Most of the spouses recruited as interviewees were current Service spouses from the RAF and the Army. The vast majority of these spouses were on a career path to nursing, through NHS-funded degrees. Clearly, the planned withdrawal of the NHS-funded degrees and bursaries will impact negatively on nursing careers for Service spouses.

The QAA mandates AVAs to submit 'End of Year Reviews' that contain profile data on AHED students recruited to the regional FEIs. However, adults with a Service background do not form part of this regional profiling. To support this research project, the partner AVA included an additional question in their End of Year Reviews over a two-year period, from 2013, with the aim of profiling the region's AHED students with a Service background.

However, it appears that because the FEIs were not mandated to provide this data, and the fact that FEIs had to rely on AHED students volunteering this information, a high level of incomplete data was returned over this two-year period. Although this prevented any detailed inferences being drawn with respect to the number and profile of AHED students with a Service background, the limited data did suggest that adults with an Army background dominated the cohorts for 2013/14 and 2014/15. This was supported by the profile of the past, current and potential AHED student interviewees recruited to this study, the majority of which were ex-Army personnel, from non-commissioned ranks at Lance Corporal or below. This is linked to further findings from this research, which suggests that Army personnel, particularly those from the lower ranks, have more limited opportunities for adult education whilst in Service than personnel from other Services or Officer ranks. This leaves many Army SLs with the only option of having to delay their HE ambitions, until they have left Service.

Additionally, the findings also suggest that Army SLs, in particular, failed to receive aspirational C-IAG through their resettlement support, with many leaving Service unaware of AHED.

AHED sector professionals acknowledged that adults with a Service background were an untapped market for their courses and proposed that they needed to take measures to proactively recruit students from their local military communities. However, the lack of any administrative procedure to formally generate data on AHED students with a Service background would have implications for the monitoring and evaluation of any initiatives implemented with an expressed aim of increasing the number of these AHED students. Consideration will need to be given as to how this can best be achieved, to meet the needs of the AHED sector, whilst respecting the rights of individuals who may not want to disclose their Service background.

■ Recommendation:

- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) should consider requesting profile data on AHED students with a Service background from the AVAs.

4.2 FACTORS IMPACTING ON KNOWLEDGE OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED)

4.2.1 ACCESS TO ADULT CAREER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (C-IAG)

It is clear that the MOD has a comprehensive system of resettlement C-IAG in place to support SLs in managing their transition to post-military employment or careers. However, although those who have served for more than four years can receive some C-IAG through their Service's 2nd Line resettlement provision, the full C-IAG element of 3rd-line resettlement support, delivered through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP), is limited to those who have served for more than 6 years, or those who have been medically discharged.

Although both C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals suggested that most of their SL clients showed little interest in studying for a degree, a majority of the ex-Service personnel described the C-IAG that they had received through CTP as lacking in aspiration, often with little or no mention of university. They talked about the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) having been focused on supporting them to find post-military employment, rather than post-military careers and particularly careers that required a degree.

Both resettlement professionals and ex-Service personnel talked about SLs needing access to C-IAG long before the official resettlement period, to enable more effective planning and preparation, particularly for those who aspired to post-military careers that required them to secure a degree.

Some M-facing C-IAG professionals and ex-Service personnel suggested that the impact of a decreased military workforce, together with increased military commitments, had left some SLs unable to engage fully with the resettlement C-IAG to which they were eligible. This appeared, in particular, to be a potential issue for Navy SLs, who found they were working at sea until close to their discharge date; because 2nd line and 3rd line resettlement support has to be delivered ashore.

The C-IAG needs of medically discharged personnel appeared to be well supported during and beyond the resettlement period, with continued access to C-IAG provided through Help for Heroes (H4H) Career Recovery Service. M-facing professionals and spouses of medically-discharged personnel would like to see H4H extend its C-IAG provision to these spouses.

Service spouses who talked about having to face the challenges of transition as much as their Serving partners, appeared to have no access to bespoke, Service-friendly C-IAG, to support their own career aspirations. Indeed, it was clear that many had in fact had to put their own career plans on hold, while supporting the military career of their

partner. Army spouses, in particular, talked about increasingly limited opportunities for them to use the career and adult education resources available within the Army Education Centres.

Several M-facing and C-facing professionals suggested that the Armed Forces Covenant should be used as leverage to improve C-IAG provision to Service spouses and proposed a role in that provision for CTP.

The only provision by the MOD of C-IAG to Service spouses was to those spouses whose partners had either died in Service, or who were severely Wounded, Injured or Sick (WIS) and unable to benefit from their resettlement package. Under such circumstances, the spouse could apply to have the resettlement package transferred to them. However, one such spouse spoke of having missed out on this opportunity because neither they, nor her WIS partner, had been made aware of the procedural timeline for requesting such a transfer.

Particular cohorts, including: Service spouses (both in and ex-Service), Early Service Leavers (ESLs), Service Leavers (SLs) who have served between 4 and 6 years and ex-Service personnel, who want or need Adult C-IAG, in general only had access to the same Adult C-IAG provision, as that available to civilians.

Many C-facing C-IAG professionals described the current provision of free, Adult C-IAG to civilians as being patchy, at best. It also appeared that the provision of free, Adult C-IAG through the National Careers Service (NCS) and FEI Careers Services, was neither well known nor well understood by many M-facing C-IAG professionals, or adults with a Service background. This clearly has potential to disadvantage ESLs, SLs who have served 4-6 years, ex-Service personnel and spouses who are in need of C-IAG.

Both M-facing and C-facing C-IAG professionals talked about their feeling that C-IAG provision to adults with a Service background would be

enhanced if opportunities were available for them to network and collaborate with each other. However, no opportunities for such collaboration appeared to exist at a local or regional level.

M-facing C-IAG professionals and adults with a Service background suggested that provision, by both FEIs and HEIs, of Service-friendly Open Days and Service-friendly Admission Advisers would go a long way to supporting the particular needs of those adults with a Service background interested in non-traditional routes to HE.

■ Recommendation to Civilian-facing and Military-facing organisations:

- FEI Adult Careers Services and HIVEs, should collaborate to deliver outreach Adult C-IAG to military communities.

■ Recommendations to Civilian-facing organisations:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) should resource regional military-civilian networking events for C-IAG professionals;
- National Careers Service (NCS) and FEI Careers Services should raise awareness of their provision of free, Adult Careers IAG;
- FEIs and HEIs should hold Service-friendly Open Days;
- FEIs and HEIs should provide access to Service-friendly Admissions Advisors; and
- FEI and HEI signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant should be encouraged to use it as a basis for their commitment to widening participation in HE by adults with a Service background.

■ Recommendations to Military-facing organisations:

- MOD should ensure that all SLs can engage fully with the resettlement C-IAG to which they are eligible;
- MOD should provide access to C-IAG to Serving personnel earlier than the current resettlement period, to encourage and enable more effective post-military career planning and preparation;
- MOD should increase C-IAG support to Service spouses by contracting CTP to extend C-IAG to all spouses whose Serving partners are in resettlement;
- Help for Heroes (H4H) should expand its C-IAG provision to spouses of medically-discharged personnel;
- Service Education Centres should enable Service spouses to access their resources, particularly Army Education Centres; and
- M-facing C-IAG providers should signpost the free, Adult C-IAG available through the National Careers Service (NCS) and local FEIs Careers Services, particularly to Service spouses, ESLs and those who have served for 4-6 years or ex-Service personnel.

4.2.2 PROMOTION OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMAS (AHED)

There appears to be a general lack of formal promotion of AHED by the AHED sector. According to professionals from within the AHED sector, most AHED students were made aware of AHED informally. This was corroborated by the past, current and potential AHED students interviewed, the majority of whom, whether adults with a Serving background or spouses, had been made aware of AHED through word-of-mouth from family, friends and colleagues. There appears a

clear need for improved promotion of AHED to the civilian population, to avoid leaving anyone at risk of having to discover AHED by chance.

Despite many professionals from the AHED sector acknowledging that their local Service community provided an untapped market for their AHED courses, there was little evidence of any proactive promotion of AHED to this cohort by the AHED sector itself, apart from one FEI which had resourced a post to specifically recruit students from its local Service community.

Suggestions were made by professionals and by past, current and potential AHED students, as to how the AHED sector could promote its courses to adults with a Service background. These included: the production of bespoke AHED publicity, tailored for this specific cohort; disseminating these materials through a range of M-facing organisations, events and publications; engaging past AHED students with a Service background to act as AHED Ambassadors, to demonstrate how AHED can widen the range of post-military career opportunities available to those in transition; provision by FEIs of Service-friendly AHED taster sessions both in FEIs and in military venues; and outreach provision, by HEI Widening Participation Teams, of AHED-related IAG within military communities.

Other opportunities for the civilian sector to promote AHED to adults with a Service background were suggested, particularly to those adults from the more dispersed, and thus harder-to-reach, ex-Service community, who no longer had access to any resettlement C-IAG, and to their spouses. These suggestions, made by M-facing and C-facing professionals, included the promotion of AHED through appropriate Service charities and promotion by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

However, M-facing professionals and adults with a Service background, when talking about a role for the Service charities' sector in raising awareness of AHED, described some of the challenges that they had faced when they tried to identify specific

charities that support adult education from among the plethora of Service charities that currently exist. Suggestions were made that Cobseo could improve access to these particular charities by providing a search facility for 'Adult Education' in its online Members Directory.

M-facing C-IAG professionals and adults with a Service background proposed a range of opportunities for M-facing organisations to raise awareness of AHED amongst their users. This included promotion through: MOD Transition Fairs, Service Education Centres; Resettlement Centres; Personnel Recovery Centres/Units; H4H Recovery Centres, Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters networks; CTP Workshops, Job Fairs and e-magazine, Focus; Service Leaver Packs provided by Units; Family Welcome Packs provided by Units; HIVES; and individual Service Family Federation magazines, websites and social media groups.

M-facing and C-facing C-IAG professionals also suggested that they could use Adult Learners' Week as an opportunity to raise awareness about AHED to their users or clients.

Career Transition Partnerships (CTP) Career Consultants talked about 'steering' their SL clients towards adult education courses that were listed on CTP's 'Preferred Supplier' list. However, there were very few AHED courses on this list and the AHED providers were not even aware that the list existed. The lack of AHED providers on this list, is likely to limit opportunities for SLs to be made aware of AHED courses through their engagement with CTP.

Ex-Service personnel described several occasions where both C-facing and M-facing C-IAG providers had missed opportunities to introduce them to AHED during provision of IAG on A-levels for HE. Others talked about having missed opportunities to be made aware of AHED because they had not understood that the term 'A-level equivalents', used on UCAS, HEI and ELCAS websites, referred to AHED.

Although resettlement C-IAG professionals were, in the main, aware of AHED, there appeared to be little evidence that AHED was being utilised by these professionals in order to proactively facilitate aspirational discussions about careers that required a degree; rather, it appeared that their provision of AHED-related IAG was usually provided in response to a SL raising an interest in HE.

None of the resettlement C-IAG professionals had been aware of the www.accesstohe.ac.uk resource, so SLs were not being signposted to this website which would help them to find out more about AHED and to identify AHED courses available to them. M-facing professionals indicated that it would be particularly helpful if this web resource included case studies of post-military careers achieved through AHED.

■ Recommendations to Civilian-facing and Military-facing organisations:

- When using the term 'A-level' equivalents, clarify that it includes AHED and introduce AHED during C-IAG about A-Levels for HE; and
- Use Adult Learners' Week as an opportunity to raise awareness about AHED.

■ Recommendations to Civilian-facing organisations:

- AHED sector organisations should collaborate to increase the general promotion of AHED to the civilian population and to produce bespoke AHED promotional materials, tailored for adults with a Service background, to include signposting to the QAA's website www.accesstohe.ac.uk.
- The QAA should include case studies of AHED students with a Service background through their website www.accesstohe.ac.uk

link to 'The Access to HE Experience – Real Life Stories';

- FEIs and HEIs should enlist the support of past AHED students with a Service background as AHED Ambassadors;
- AHED providers should disseminate the bespoke AHED publicity through a range of M-facing organisations, events and publications;
- FEIs should offer Service-friendly AHED taster sessions;
- HEIs should offer outreach AHED-related IAG in settings located within military communities, as part of their Widening Participation agenda;
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) should raise awareness of AHED;
- FEIs should apply to have their AHED courses registered on the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' list; and
- Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) should promote AHED through Service charities.

■ Recommendations to Military-facing organisations:

- Resettlement C-IAG providers should raise awareness of AHED to SLs;
- Resettlement C-IAG providers should introduce case-studies of past AHED students with a Service background, provided on www.accesstohe.ac.uk [linked to a recommendation to QAA] to SLs of all ranks, to facilitate aspirational discussions about careers that require a degree;

- Raise awareness of AHED, through:
 - MOD Transition Fairs;
 - Service Education Centres;
 - Personnel Recovery Centres/Units;
 - Resettlement Centres;
 - CTP's Workshops, Job fairs and e-magazine, Focus;
 - Service Leaver Packs provided by Units;
 - Family Welcome Packs provided by Units;
 - H4H Recovery Centres, Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters networks;
 - HIVEs; and
 - Individual Service Family Federation Adult Education/Career Specialists, magazines, websites and social media groups.

- Cobseo should provide a specific search term for 'Adult Education' to help identification of relevant Service charities from its Members Directory.

4.2.3 PROVISION OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) RELATED INFORMATION, ADVICE & GUIDANCE (IAG)

There were a range of experiences described by past and current AHED students with respect to the quality of the AHED-related IAG they had received from both C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals.

Although the majority of resettlement C-IAG professionals were aware of AHED, many talked about not knowing whether their AHED-related IAG was up-to-date. A majority of them had not been aware of recent developments, whereby many HEIs now required AHED students to have GCSEs in English and Maths and, for some degree courses, Science GCSEs.

Clearly, this has implications for AHED students who need to secure any necessary GCSEs; by not

being made aware of these new requirements for HE during AHED-related IAG provision, they are unable to plan and prepare effectively, for their AHED journey to HE.

This issue was also highlighted by past and current AHED students, with many saying that they had been shocked to find out that they needed to undertake additional GCSE studies, as well as an AHED course. Many ex-Service personnel suggested that, had they been made aware of AHED and the requirement for GCSEs whilst in Service, they would have made more effort to have secured their GCSEs in English and Maths before they were discharged.

There were several M-facing C-IAG professionals, two of whom were providers of resettlement C-IAG, who had either not been aware of AHED, or had misunderstood the function of AHED and thus were unequipped to provide their clients with informed, AHED-related IAG.

M-facing C-IAG professionals indicated that, in order to ensure they were able to provide up-to-date AHED-related IAG, they needed access to what several called a 'one-stop-shop' - a resource that they could use to get the latest information on AHED and to which they could also signpost their clients. None of the M-facing professionals had been aware of the QAA's website resource www.accesstohe.ac.uk, which not only provides information on AHED, but also offers a search facility for approved AHED by subject and/or location.

Many M-facing C-IAG professionals and professionals from within the AHED sector talked about potential benefits to their AHED-related IAG to adults with a Service background, if both sectors were given opportunities to network, collaborate and share AHED-related Continuing Professional Development (CPD), at both a local and regional level. They felt that such an opportunity would serve to improve the journey to and through AHED for adults with a Service background.

Several M-facing professionals and two potential AHED students, both of whom were still in Service, indicated a lack of understanding regarding the distinction between distance learning AHED courses and the Open University (O.U.) Access modules. There are obviously implications here for those who plan to undertake an O.U. Access module in the mistaken belief that it would offer them a non-traditional route into a brick university.

It was evident from interviews with M-facing C-IAG professionals and with adults who had a Serving background, that O.U. courses were favourably promoted by the military, citing the distance learning element of these courses as being much more convenient for the Serving lifestyle than courses delivered at an FEI. It was also clear that the O.U. knowledge base of many M-facing C-IAG professionals was gained from their own experience of having been an O.U. student.

■ Recommendation to Civilian-facing and Military-facing organisations:

- All C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals should undertake regular AHED-related CPD.

■ Recommendations to Civilian-facing organisations:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) should resource regional military-civilian networking events for C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals and invite AVAs to provide AHED updates and deliver joint AHED-related CPD; and
- QAA should raise awareness about the distinction between distance learning AHED courses and the O.U. Access modules, on its website www.accesstohe.ac.uk.

■ Recommendations to Military-facing organisations:

- M-facing providers should invite representatives from local AHED provider to contribute to their C-IAG staff CPD sessions;
- All M-facing C-IAG providers should be made aware of AHED and equipped to provide up-to-date AHED-related IAG; and
- M-facing C-IAG providers should be aware of the distinction between a distance learning AHED course and an O.U. Access module.

4.3 FACTORS IMPACTING ON ENGAGEMENT WITH ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMAS (AHED)

4.3.1 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL EDUCATION DURING SERVICE

According to both M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel there was now less time available for personal study opportunities whilst Serving than had been possible in the past. They suggested that this was due to the increased workloads on personnel within a decreased military workforce. Both M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel suggested that these already limited opportunities for personal study during Service were even less likely to be available to those from the lower ranks and particularly to those from the lower ranks of the Army.

Although some Wounded, Injured or Sick (WIS) personnel recovering within Personnel Recovery Units and Centres had been given an opportunity to attend a local FEI to study an AHED, there were also cases of WIS personnel in a similar situation who had not been given this opportunity.

Access Co-ordinators acknowledged that the late confirmation of AHED course timetables had impacted negatively on some Serving personnel who had been trying to negotiate time off work for AHED study at an FEI.

■ Recommendation:

- FEIs should offer earlier confirmation of their AHED course timetables.

4.3.2 STUDY FORMAT OF ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) COURSES

M-facing professionals, together with past and current AHED students, including those with a Serving background and spouses, talked about there being a need for more flexible AHED course study options, citing distance and blended learning, in particular. They proposed that this would enable more Serving personnel and Service spouses to be able to consider AHED whilst in the military; enabling them to better manage their AHED studies around relocations and providing Service spouses with more flexibility to manage their childcare arrangements, particularly for those who faced extended periods of lone parenting, when their Serving partner was away on military commitments.

■ Recommendation:

- AHED sector should increase provision of more flexible AHED course delivery formats, including distance and blended learning.

4.3.3 FUNDING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION DIPLOMA (AHED) AND DEGREE FEES

It was clear that many C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals were unable to provide SLs with fully-informed AHED-related IAG regarding the civilian and military funding options available to them. There was a particular lack of awareness amongst civilian professionals about the military's free

degree offer through the Publicly-Funded Further Education/Higher Education (PF FE/HE) Scheme and a lack of awareness amongst resettlement C-IAG professionals regarding the use of the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan to secure fee-free AHED courses for those who progress to complete an HE course. It appeared that most SLs had not been made aware of the option to use a combination of the 24+ loan and the PF FE/HE Scheme, to enable them to study for AHED and a degree, both free from tuition fees.

Ex-Service personnel talked about a general lack of promotion of the PF FE/HE Scheme, particularly within the Army and Navy. Several of the ex-Service personnel, who had engaged with the PF FE/HE Scheme, referred to it as being highly bureaucratic and many said they had encountered problems navigating the administration process.

Suggestions were made by many ex-Service personnel that resettlement C-IAG providers should provide aspirational C-IAG by promoting AHED alongside the promotion of the PF FE/HE Scheme, to broaden interest in the free degree scheme from those SLs who do not have A-levels.

There appeared to be some ambiguity amongst resettlement C-IAG professionals as to whether the PF FE/HE Scheme could be used to fund course fees for AHED or a degree, or fees for both AHED and a degree. This indicates that there needs to be clarification from the scheme's administrator, ELCAS, regarding the use of the PF FE/HE Scheme for AHED and/or degree fees. However, C-facing C-IAG professionals pointed out that, if eligible SLs used the 24+ loan to pay for AHED course fees, they could save their military funding for their degree course fees.

FEIs and HEIs that have not secured 'Approved Provider' status from ELCAS, created problems for ex-Service students who wanted to use their military funds to pay for their course fees.

Providers of resettlement support to Early Service Leavers (ESLs), talked about funding for AHED courses as having been a particular barrier for some of their clients, many of whom had been under 24 years of age and therefore not eligible for the 24+ loan. The introduction of the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan in August 2016 will open up the AHED market to many of these ESLs. Additionally, this 19+ loan will also widen the AHED market to those adult dependants aged 19 to 23 years, who had also been excluded from using the 24+ loan.

According to both M-facing and C-facing professionals and many spouses, the adult education funding needs of Service spouses has been overlooked. They talked about the MOD's failure to acknowledge the sacrifices that these spouses had made to their own career journeys, whilst supporting the military careers of their Serving partners. This appeared to be a particular issue for Army and Navy spouses, who seemed to have found it more difficult to undertake FE or HE courses, due to their families' frequent relocations within the military. Many proposed that they would like to see the resettlement support for FE and HE that is currently available to SLs, to be either extended to Service spouses, or for all SLs to have the option of transferring their resettlement package to their spouse.

The fact that 73% of the spouses were on a career path to nursing, through NHS-funded degrees, suggests that spouses would be particularly hard hit by the UK Government's planned withdrawal of these NHS-funded degrees and bursaries.

■ Recommendation to Civilian-facing and Military-facing organisations:

- All C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals should ensure that eligible SLs and ex-Service personnel are made aware that they could study for a tuition fee-free AHED and a tuition fee-free degree course, through the combined use of the 24+

Advanced Learner Loan for AHED fees and the PF FE/HE Scheme for degree fees.

■ Recommendations to Civilian-facing and Military-facing organisations:

- QAA should provide information about the range of civilian and military AHED course funding opportunities available to SLs and ex-Service personnel, under the 'FAQs' link on their website www.accesstohe.ac.uk;
- AHED sector professionals should include targeting of ESLs and adult dependants, aged between 19 and 23 years, when promoting the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan; and
- FEIs and HEIs should secure registration with ELCAS for 'Approved Provider Status', to enable students to use ELCs or the PF FE/HE Scheme to fund course fees.

■ Recommendations to Military-facing organisations:

- ELCAS should provide clarification on whether the PF FE/HE Scheme can be used to pay for fees for AHED and/or degree courses;
- M-facing C-IAG providers should promote the availability of the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan (replacing the 24+ loan with effect from 1st August 2016) to provide a fee-free AHED course for those who progress to complete an HE course;
- Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and 2nd Line Resettlement providers should increase promotion of the PF FE/HE Scheme, particularly to Army and Navy SLs, together with information about AHED, to broaden interest in the free degree scheme from those SLs without A-levels; and

- MOD should provide Service spouses with a resettlement package to improve their employment and career prospects in transition.

4.3.4 FUNDING LIVING COSTS AT FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (FEIs)

C-IAG professionals, together with past, current and potential AHED students, talked about funding living costs whilst an AHED student, as one of the biggest concerns for those considering AHED study, particularly for those who had a family to support and/or where their spouse was unemployed or under-employed.

AHED sector professionals described several cases when potential AHED students had misunderstood the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan to be available for supporting their living costs while studying at FE. It is not. They believed that this limitation with the 24+ loan had not been clearly communicated to AHED students.

■ Recommendation:

- All C-facing and M-facing providers should raise awareness that the 24+/19+ Advanced Learner Loan can only be used to fund AHED course fees, rather than living costs while an AHED student.

4.3.5 CURRENCY OF MILITARY QUALIFICATIONS

The issue created by the lack of currency of many military qualifications for entrance to Higher Education courses was acknowledged by C-facing and M-facing professionals and ex-Service personnel, a particular concern being that SLs may be forced, inappropriately, down the AHED route, instead of having their prior learning in the military acknowledged by HEIs, to gain access to a degree course through Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL).

Although there is a military procedure in place to get military qualifications mapped to the National

Qualifications Framework (NQF), many personnel had not engaged with it and left Service with only their military qualifications. They were later shocked to discover that their military qualifications were not valued within the civilian world, as many said they had been led to believe.

One military professional talked about what he felt to be an unfair military qualifications system, in that civilians who gained qualifications became increasingly more employable, but that this was not the case for Serving personnel.

■ Recommendations:

- HEIs and the MOD should collaborate to improve mutual understanding about the skills and subject content within military qualifications; and
- MOD should encourage more SLs to get their military qualifications mapped to the NQF.

4.3.6 GCSE REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)

It appeared that many Army personnel had left Service with the mistaken belief that their Level 2 Functional Skills in Literacy and Numeracy equated to Level 2 GCSEs in English and Maths. This proved to be a particular problem for those planning to do an AHED because they then either had to study their GCSEs alongside their AHED course – something many described as having been very stressful – or they had to complete a separate ‘pre-AHED’ course to secure their GCSEs prior to starting their AHED.

A number of ex-Army personnel suggested that had they been made aware of AHED during Service and also aware of the limited currency of their Functional Skills qualifications within the civilian HE sector; they would have made more effort to have secured their GCSEs whilst in Service through the opportunities available to them in the Service Education Centres.

Many of the Service spouses did not have the required GCSEs either and also suggested that, had they been aware of AHED earlier and the need for these GCSEs, they too would have made much more effort to have secured the GCSEs through their Service Education Centres. It appeared that this was an option for many RAF and Navy spouses, but not so for most Army spouses, who seemed to have much more limited access to the use of their Army Education Centre resources, except when they were stationed overseas.

None of the resettlement C-IAG professionals appeared to be aware of the recent developments in the AHED sector; whereby many HEIs were now requiring AHED students to have GCSEs in English, Maths and, in some cases, Science.

Many C-facing C-IAG professionals referred to the challenges that they faced in trying to keep up-to-date with developments within the AHED sector.

- Recommendation to Civilian-facing organisation:
 - Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) should provide updates on developments within the AHED sector at Local Enterprise Partnership-resourced military-civilian C-IAG regional networking events [linked to earlier recommendation to LEPs].
- Recommendations to Military-facing organisations:
 - The Army should ensure that its personnel, particularly SLs, understand that Level 2 Functional Skills in Literacy and Numeracy do not equate to Level 2 GCSEs in English and Maths; and
 - All M-facing C-IAG providers should raise awareness about the increasing need for GCSEs in English and Maths, for those considering HE through the AHED route.

4.3.7 RELOCATION WITHIN SERVICE

Frequent relocations with the military, a particular issue for Army families, was found to have impacted negatively on Service spouses who wanted to progress their careers through AHED. Many had either had to delay starting their AHED course or having to abandon their course, they then found that they were unable to transfer to another FEI, because AHED courses tend to be bespoke to each FEI provider.

One RAF spouse described how they had had to abandon a degree course during the second year, when their Serving partner was unexpectedly relocated abroad. On the Service family's return to the UK, over five years later, they found out that they could not re-enter HE, because they were unable to demonstrate evidence of 'recent' academic study in the preceding five-year period. The only option then available to them was to do an AHED course.

Other spouses, notably Army spouses, had also experienced problems that were related to their frequent relocations; when it came to completing their UCAS applications, many had no idea where their Army partner was going to be posted in the forthcoming 2 to 4-year period, as a consequence of which they had to complete their UCAS HEI options, based on a best guess. These spouses also indicated that they were reluctant to discuss their dilemma with HEI Admissions, in case it jeopardised their degree application.

Some Army spouses had been unable to progress from their AHED course to a degree course within the effective 'currency period' of their AHED qualification – usually a five-year period that HEIs require prospective students to evidence 'recent' academic study. Clearly, there are personal financial implications here for those Service spouses who have funded their AHED course using the 24+ Loan, because the loan is only wiped out on completion of an HE course.

■ Recommendations:

- The QAA should encourage a higher degree of standardisation across AHED course provision, to facilitate more inter-course transfers to other FEIs; and
- The Department of Business Innovation and Skills should exempt those Service spouses who have been unable to progress from their AHED qualification to an HE course within a five year period - because of factors related to their military life - from having to repay the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan that they used to fund their AHED course fees.

4.3.8 LEARNING SUPPORT AT FURTHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (FEIs)

A range of learner support needs for ex-Service personnel were identified by both AHED providers and ex-Service personnel and included, in particular, support for dyslexia and mental health issues, often including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Ex-service personnel who had experienced mental health problems as an AHED student suggested that FEI staff should receive specific training on PTSD because some students may not have had it diagnosed; they proposed a supporting role here from the Service charities.

■ Recommendations:

- FEIs should ensure that their support staff are equipped to support the specific mental health needs of ex-Service students, including those with PTSD; and
- FEIs should liaise with Service charities such as H4H and Combat Stress to identify appropriate support for students with PTSD.

4.3.9 CHILDCARE

Childcare costs and the availability of quality provision appear to impact negatively on opportunities for Service spouses to undertake adult education courses; this had been a particular problem for Service spouses who had found themselves lone parenting for extended periods during their AHED studies, when their Serving partner was away on long-term military commitments.

Although AHED courses are usually timetabled to accommodate the needs of students with school-age children, the late timetabling of AHED courses had proven problematic for spouses who needed to confirm childcare arrangements – a particular challenge in areas where there was a lack of quality, affordable childcare.

■ Recommendations:

- Local Authorities should increase access to quality, affordable childcare for Service spouses who are in adult education; and
- FEIs should provide earlier confirmation of their AHED course timetables.

4.3.10 TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Ex-Service personnel described a range of challenges that they had faced when adapting to their post-military world, particularly in relation to having been institutionalised by their military experience; they talked about feelings of loss and isolation, from losing the companionship of their military colleagues.

However, it was clear that their experiences as AHED students immersed, as they were, within a civilian peer group, had supported them on their post-discharge journey to becoming a civilian once again. Many had described the AHED course as an opportunity for 'civilianising' and to 'de-militarise'.

Access Co-ordinators talked about AHED courses providing SLs with an 'airlock', a safe space to enable them to assimilate the challenging, cultural shifts that many experienced after leaving Service.

AHED study also appeared to support the transition of those SLs who had been medically discharged, helping them to rebuild the confidence that many had lost after becoming wounded, injured or sick. Several made specific reference to their belief that their AHED experience had helped them to cope with their mental health issues, by providing them with a constructive distraction, within the structure of an FEI environment.

Ex-Service personnel, who had not been able to start their AHED course soon after discharge, usually because they had not been made aware of it, talked about their regret at not having had the opportunity to start their course earlier; suggesting that, had they done so, they could have avoided the challenging void and associated problems that many had experienced in transition.

Suggestions were made by M-facing and C-facing professionals and by both ex-Service personnel and spouses, that the AHED course could be marketed to SLs as not only a qualification that provides a non-traditional route to HE, but a qualification that offers a valuable experience, within a structured environment, to facilitate a positive transition journey.

The AHED course had also supported the transition experience of spouses. It had enabled many to progress on to a career pathway to support their post-Service family income. It appeared that this was particularly important for those spouses who either found themselves in a position of being or becoming the main earner, after their partner's medical discharge, or for those post-Service families that required a dual income in transition.

Many professionals, supported by research evidence [Centre for Social Justice, 2016] talked about Service families having improved chances of more successful transition outcomes when the spouse is successfully employed.

The high mobility of Army families, which can impact negatively on those Army spouses who want to develop their own careers, suggests that Army families could be at higher risk of poor transitions when compared to those from the other Services, because the Army spouses appeared to be at a higher risk of being unemployed or under-employed. This would make a case for Army spouses to be considered a priority cohort for receipt of bespoke MOD support for their career development, particularly during their partners' resettlement period.

■ Recommendations:

- The QAA should consider re-branding AHED for the Service Leaver market, as a stand-alone qualification, providing not only a non-traditional route to HE but also an experience to support transition; and
- The MOD should provide Service spouses with a resettlement package to improve their employment and career prospects in transition

5. Summary of recommendations



A summary of the recommendations that individual sectors and organisations should consider, for improving the journey to and through AHED for adults with a Service background, follows.

All Civilian-facing and Military-facing Career-IAG providers, should consider:

- Undertaking regular AHED-related Continuing Professional Development;
- Using Adult Learners' Week as an opportunity to raise awareness about AHED;
- Clarifying, when using the term 'A-level' equivalents, that it includes AHED and introduce AHED during C-IAG about A-Levels for HE;
- Raising awareness that the 24+ (soon to become 19+) Advanced Learner Loan can only be used to fund AHED course fees, not living costs while an AHED student; and
- Promoting the opportunity to eligible Service Leavers and ex-Service personnel that, through the combined use of the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan and the PF FE/HE Scheme, there is an opportunity to study an AHED and a degree course free from tuition fees.

The Access to Higher Education Diploma sector specifically, should consider:

- Collaborating to increase the general promotion of AHED to the civilian population and to produce bespoke AHED promotional materials, tailored for adults with a Service background, to include signposting to the

QAA's website: www.accesstohe.ac.uk;

- Disseminating bespoke AHED publicity through a range of M-facing organisations, events and publications;
- Increasing provision of more flexible AHED course delivery formats, including distance and blended learning; and
- Including the targeting of Early Service Leavers (ESLs) and adult dependants, aged between 19 and 23 years, when promoting the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) specifically, should consider:

- Facilitating a higher degree of standardisation across AHED course provision, to facilitate more inter-course transfers between FEIs;
- Including case studies of AHED students with a Service background through their website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk) link to 'The Access to HE Experience – Real Life Stories';
- Providing information about the range of AHED course funding opportunities available to SLs and ex-Service personnel, under the 'FAQs' link on their website www.accesstohe.ac.uk;
- Raising awareness about the distinction between distance learning AHED courses and the Open University's (O.U.) Access modules, through its website www.accesstohe.ac.uk;

- Requesting profile data on AHED students with a Service background, through the 'End of Year Reviews' submitted by AVAs; and
- Re-branding AHED for the Service Leaver market, as a stand-alone qualification, providing not only a non-traditional route to Higher Education, but also an experience that supports transition.

Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) specifically, should consider:

- Providing AHED updates and AHED-related Continuing Professional Development to Civilian-facing (C-facing) and Military-facing (M-facing) C-IAG professionals attending Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)-resourced regional military-civilian networking events for C-facing and M-facing C-IAG professionals [linked to recommendation to LEPs]; and
- Promoting AHED in collaboration with Service charities.

Further Education Institutes (FEIs) specifically, should consider:

- Raising awareness about their provision of free, Adult Careers IAG;
- Collaborating with HIVEs, to deliver outreach Adult C-IAG to military communities;
- Enlisting the support of past AHED students with a Service background as AHED Ambassadors;
- Holding Service-friendly Open Days;
- Providing access to Service-friendly Admissions Advisors;
- Offering Service-friendly AHED taster sessions;

- Applying to get their AHED courses registered on the CTP 'Preferred Supplier' List;
- Providing earlier confirmation of their AHED course timetables;
- Registering with ELCAS for 'Approved Provider Status', to enable students to use ELCs or the PF FE/HE Scheme to fund course fees;
- Equipping staff to support the specific mental health needs of ex-Service students with PTSD;
- Liaising with Service charities, such as Help for Heroes (H4H) Career Recovery Services or Combat Stress, to identify appropriate signposting support for students with PTSD; and
- Using their signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, as commitment to widening participation in HE by adults with a Service background.

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) specifically, should consider:

- Holding Service-friendly Open Days;
- Providing access to Service-friendly Admissions Advisors;
- Offering outreach AHED-related IAG in settings located within military communities, through their Widening Participation activities;
- Enlisting the support of past AHED students with a Service background as AHED Ambassadors;
- Registering with Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Services (ELCAS) for 'Approved Provider Status', to enable students to use Enhanced Learning Credits (ELCs) or the Publicly-Funded FE/HE Scheme to fund course fees;

- Collaborating with the MOD to improve mutual understanding regarding the skills and subject content within military qualifications; and
- Using their signatories to the Armed Forces Covenant, as commitment to widening participation in Higher Education by adults with a Service background, particularly for spouses.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) specifically, should consider:

- Resourcing regional military-civilian networking events for C-IAG professionals.

The National Careers Service (NCS) specifically, should consider:

- Raising awareness of their provision of free, Adult Careers IAG.

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills, specifically, should consider:

- Exempting those Service spouses who have been unable to progress from their AHED qualification to a degree course within five years - due to factors related to their military life - from having to repay the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan used to fund their AHED course.

Local Authorities specifically, should consider:

- Increasing access to quality, affordable childcare for Service spouses who are in adult education.

The MOD specifically, should consider:

- Ensuring that all SLs can engage fully with resettlement C-IAG to which they are eligible;
- Collaborating with HEIs to improve mutual understanding regarding the skills and subject content within military qualifications;

- Encouraging more SLs to get their military qualifications mapped to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF);

- Raising awareness of AHED through MOD Transition Fairs;

- Providing access to C-IAG to Serving personnel earlier than the current resettlement period, to encourage and enable more effective post-military career planning and preparation; and

- Providing Service spouses with a resettlement package.

The Army specifically, should consider:

- Ensuring that its personnel, particularly SLs, understand that Level 2 Functional Skills in literacy and Numeracy do not equate to Level 2 GCSEs in English and Maths and encourage increase study of GCSEs in English and Maths during Service.

The Enhanced Learning Credits Administration Services (ELCAS) specifically, should consider:

- Providing clarification on whether the PF FE/HE Scheme can be used to pay for fees for AHED and/or Degree courses.

All Military-facing Career-IAG providers, should consider:

- Signposting their users/clients to the free, Adult C-IAG available through the National Careers Service and local FEIs Careers Services, particularly those whose clients are Service spouses, Early Service Leavers, those who have served for 4-6 years or ex-Service personnel;
- Raising awareness of AHED to their clients/users;

- Ensuring that they are equipped to provide up-to-date information about AHED and, for those who provide advice and guidance, to provide up-to-date AHED-related IAG;
- Inviting local AHED providers to contribute to their M-facing C-IAG staff Continuing Professional Development sessions;
- Raising awareness regarding the distinction between a distance learning AHED course and an Open University Access module;
- Promoting the new 19+ Advanced Learner Loan for funding AHED and how the AHED-funding element of the loan will be waived on completion of an HE course, to provide a fee-free AHED course; and
- Raising awareness about the increasing need for GCSEs in English and Maths, and Science for some degree courses, for those considering HE through the AHED route.

Resettlement Career-IAG providers, specifically those delivering 2nd and 3rd Line resettlement Career-IAG, should consider:

- Raising awareness of AHED to Service Leavers;
- Introducing case-studies of past AHED students with a Service background, provided on www.accesstohe.ac.uk [linked to a recommendation to the QAA] to SLs of all ranks, to facilitate aspirational discussions about careers that require a degree;
- Increasing promotion of the Publicly-Funded FE/HE Scheme, particularly to Army and Navy Service Leavers (SLs), together with information about AHED, to broaden interest in this free degree scheme from those SLs without A-levels; and

- Raising awareness that many SLs may be eligible to receive both fee-free AHED and degree courses through the combined use of the 24+ Advanced Learner Loan for AHED fees and the PF FE/HE Scheme for degree fees.

The Career Transition Partnership (CTP) specifically, should consider:

- Raising awareness of AHED through CTP Workshops, CTP Job fairs and through CTP's e-magazine, Focus.

Help for Heroes (H4H) specifically, should consider:

- Raising awareness of AHED through H4H Recovery Centres and through its Band of Brothers and Band of Sisters networks; and
- Expanding its C-IAG provision to spouses of medically-discharged personnel.

Service Education Centres specifically, should consider:

- Enabling Service spouses to access their resources, particularly Army Education Centres.

Service Units, specifically, should consider:

- Including information on AHED in the 1st Line Resettlement Packs, provided by Units to SLs; and
- Including information about local AHED provision in the Unit Welcome Packs that are issued to Service families.

HIVEs specifically, should consider:

- Displaying information about local AHED courses and signposting enquiries to www.accesstohe.ac.uk; and

- Collaborating with FEI Adult Careers Services to deliver outreach Adult C-IAG to military communities.

Service Family Federations specifically, should consider:

- Raising awareness of AHED through their Adult Education/Career Specialists and through the individual Service Family Federation magazines, websites and social media groups.

The Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) specifically, should consider:

- Including a specific search term for 'Adult Education' for those searching its Members Directory for appropriate Service charities.

These recommendations are offered to inform Civilian-facing and Military-facing stakeholder decisions. They aim to ensure that AHED students are not disadvantaged by their Service background and, in doing so, contribute to more successful transitions for those seeking fulfilling civilian careers through the AHED route.

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7. Appendices



APPENDIX 1

Question included by the AVA in their End of Year Review, to profile AHED student's with a Service background

How many of your AHED students have a Service background?

Service	Affiliation to Service	Number
Army	Service Leaver	
	Ex-Service, served < 4 years	
	Ex-Service, served 4-6 years	
	Ex-Service, served >6 years	
	Spouse or partner	
	Dependant 'Service Child'	
	Unspecified	
Navy / Marines	Service Leaver	
	Ex-Service, served < 4 years	
	Ex-Service, served 4-6 years	
	Ex-Service, served >6 years	
	Spouse or partner	
	Dependant 'Service Child'	
	Unspecified	
RAF	Service Leaver	
	Ex-Service, served < 4 years	
	Ex-Service, served 4-6 years	
	Ex-Service, served >6 years	
	Spouse or partner	
	Dependant 'Service Child'	
	Unspecified	

APPENDIX 2

Survey questions to Access Co-ordinators, delivered via Survey Monkey

1. Name of FEI;
2. How are your AHED courses promoted to the local community?
3. Is there any flexibility in how your AHED courses can be delivered: - with respect to:
 - a. Distance learning;
 - b. Blended learning;
 - c. Start dates;
 - d. Evening sessions; and
 - e. Other, please describe;
4. Are you aware of any military bases within your FEI's recruitment area?
5. Have your AHED courses recruited students with a Service background, over the past 3 years?
6. Has your work brought you into contact with any military career or adult education professionals?
 - a. If yes, please provide more information;
7. Do you target recruitment of AHED students with a Service background?
 - a. If yes, please provide more information;
8. Do you have any knowledge of the military resettlement support for adult education available to Service personnel and those leaving Service; namely Enhanced Learning Credits and the Publicly-funded FE/HE Scheme?
9. Are your AHED courses registered with ELCAS as an 'Approved provider'?
10. Are you interested in any further involvement with this research project, either as an interviewee or as a member of the project's Steering Group?

APPENDIX 3

Interview prompts for semi-structured interviews with Access Co-ordinators

1. Local community access to free, Adult C-IAG.
2. Awareness of AHED amongst the local community.
3. Promotion of AHED to the local community.
4. Funding of AHED course fees.
5. Provision of AHED-related IAG.
6. Knowledge of military careers and adult education sector.
7. Knowledge of military resettlement support for adult education.
8. Military-civilian links between C-IAG/adult education professionals.
9. Recruitment of adults with a Service background.
10. Marketing of AHED to adults with a Service background.
11. Knowledge of any factors, related to an adult's Service background, that can impact on the journey to and through AHED.
12. Opportunities for the AHED sector to improve the journey to and through AHED, for those with a Service background.

APPENDIX 4

Interview prompts for semi-structured interviews with C-IAG professionals

For C-facing professionals

1. The organisation;
2. The role;
3. Clients / users;
4. C-IAG provision;
5. AHED-related IAG provision;
6. Links with AHED-sector professionals;
7. Advice and guidance on funding AHED ;
8. Knowledge of military resettlement support for careers and adult education;
9. Knowledge of adult education opportunities for Serving personnel;
10. Interest in AHED by clients/users with a Service background;
11. Links with the M-facing C-IAG sector;
12. Factors, related to an adult's Service background that can impact on their journey to and through AHED; and
13. Opportunities to improve the journey to and through AHED, for those with a Service background.

For M-facing professionals

1. The organisation;
2. The role;
3. Clients / users;
4. C-IAG provision;
5. Links with other M-facing C-IAG providers;
6. Knowledge of C-facing C-IAG provision;
7. Knowledge of non-traditional routes to HE, including AHED;
8. Interest in AHED by clients/users;
9. Provision of AHED-related IAG;
10. Advice and guidance on funding AHED ;
11. Links with FEIs and HEIs;
12. Factors, related to an adult's Service background that can impact on their journey to and through AHED; and
13. Opportunities to improve the journey to and through AHED, for those with a Service background.

APPENDIX 5

Profile of C-IAG Interviewees

Military community served	Civilian-facing organisation	Military-facing organisation	Post title	Interviewee transcript codes
Army	FEI	-	Careers Adviser	FECA-1
Army	Community Learning Centre (FEI Satellite)	-	Co-ordinator	CLC
Army	-	Army Resettlement	2 x Individual Education and Resettlement Officers (IEROs) – providing 2nd line resettlement support	IERO-1 IERO-2
Army	-	Army - Unit	Education & Resettlement Officer - providing 1st line resettlement support	ERO
Army	-	Army Unit	Unit Welfare Officer	UWO
Army	-	Service Families Federation	Employment & Training Specialist	SFF
Army	-	CTP Assist	Specialist Employment Consultant	CTP/A-1
RAF	-	CTP Assist	Specialist Employment Consultant	CTP/A-2
RAF	-	RAF Resettlement	Resettlement & Education Co-ordinator – providing 2nd line resettlement support	REC
RAF	FEI	-	Adult Careers Adviser	FECA-2
Tri-Service	-	CTP	3 x CTP Career Consultants	CTP-1 CTP-2 CTP-3
Tri-Service	-	CTP	Workshop Facilitator	CTP-4

Tri Tri-Service	-	CTP/Future Horizon Programme (FHP)	3 x FHP Career Advisers	FHP-1 FHP-2 FHP-3
Tri-Service	-	Recruit for Spouses	Management	RFS
Tri-Service	Job Centre Plus	-	Partnership Manager	JC+
Tri-Service	Local Enterprise Partnership	-	Business Engagement Manager	LEP
Tri-Service	-	H4H Careers Recovery	2 x H4H Careers Advisers	H4H-1 H4H-2
Navy/Marine	FEI	-	Adult Careers Adviser	FECA-3
Navy/Marine	-	HIVE	Information Officer	HIVE
Navy/Marine	HEI	-	HE Outreach Advisor	HE
Navy/Marine	-	Navy Resettlement	Naval Resettlement & Information Officers – providing 2nd Line Resettlement	NET-3
Navy/Marine	-	Navy Education Centre	2 x Naval Education & Training Officers – providing adult education-related IAG and 2nd Line resettlement	NET-1 NET-2
Navy/Marine	-	CTP Assist	Specialist Employment Consultant	CTP/A-3
Marine	-	Marine Personnel Recovery Centre	Specialist Employment Consultant	PRC

APPENDIX 6

Profile of C-IAG and AHED sector workshop participants

Workshop	Military community served	Civilian-facing organisation	Military-facing organisation	Post title
One: Held near Army base	Army	-	Army Families Federation	Employment & Training Specialist
	Army	-	Army Resettlement	Individual Employment & Resettlement Officer
	Tri-Service	-	CTP	CTP Careers Adviser
	Tri-Service	FEI	-	Access Co-ordinator
	Tri-Service	FEI	-	Head of Adult Enterprise
	Tri-Service	HEI	-	Widening Participation Manager
Two: Head near Navy base	Tri-Service	AVA	-	Compliance Officer
	Tri-Service	HEI	-	Outreach Advisor
	Tri-Service	HEI	-	Careers Adviser
	Tri-Service	HEI	-	Professor of Geography
	Tri-Service	-	FHP	Specialist Employment Consultant
	Tri-Service	-	CTP	2x CTP Careers Advisers

APPENDIX 7

Publicity to recruit past, current and potential AHED student interviewees.

Do you have a Forces background?
As a Service Leaver, ex-Service Personnel,
Service Spouse/Partner or a dependant adult
'Service Child'

Are you a current or past
'Access to HE Diploma' student?

or

Have you considered doing an
'Access to HE Diploma'?

Bath Spa University would like to hear from you if you answered 'yes' to these questions and would consider being interviewed between now and the end of December 2015 - to share, in confidence, your experience as an Access student or potential Access student.

As a thank you, those interviewed* will receive a £20 High Street Voucher

* Due to restrictions from the MOD's research ethics guidance, we are unable to offer these vouchers to any Serving personnel

If you are interest in being involved and would like more information, please contact:

Dr Mel Macer, Bath Spa University.

Email: m.macer@bathspa.ac.uk Tel: 01225-875546

APPENDIX 8

Profile of past, current and potential AHED student interviewees

Profile	No. From Army	No. From Vavy	No. From Marine	No. From RAF
Past AHED student	8	1	1	2
Current AHED student	8	4	2	6
Potential AHED student	5	0	0	2
Male	9	4	2	1
Female	12	1	1	9
Ex-Service ESL	0	0	0	0
Ex-Service, 4-6 years	2	1	0	0
Ex-Service, > 6 years	6	1	0	1
Medically discharged SL	4	2	2	3
SL > 6 years	1	0	0	0
WIS In-Service	1	0	0	0
Non-commissioned rank	12	4	1	4
Rank of Lance Corporal equivalent or below	11	4	1	0
In-Service spouse	3	1	1	5
In-Service spouse of WIS personnel	1	0	0	0
Ex-Service spouse	1	0	0	1
Ex-Service spouse of medically discharged personnel	2	0	0	0

Coding format for interviewee quotes:

- Ex-Service, having served for more than 6 years: e.g. Army>6;
- Ex-Service, having served for 4-6 years: e.g. Navy4-6;
- Medically discharged from Service: e.g. RAFMD;
- WIS Service personnel: e.g. ArmyWIS;
- Service Leaver: e.g. ArmySL;
- Spouse of Serving personnel: e.g. RAFSp-IN;
- Spouse of ex-Service personnel: e.g. ArmySp-EX;
- Spouse of WIS personnel: e.g. ArmySp-WIS; and
- Spouse of medically discharged personnel: e.g. ArmySp-MD.

APPENDIX 9

Interview prompts for past, current and potential AHED student interviewees.

AHED student profile

- Service affiliation;
- AHED course studied;
- For past AHED students, the year of completion of AHED course; and
- For those with a Serving background:
 - Year of discharge, where relevant
 - Rank, current or at point of discharge
 - Length of time Served
 - Mode of discharge i.e. non-medical or medical.

Journey to AHED

- Access to Adult C-IAG;
- Resettlement support for pathway to HE, where relevant;
- Introduction to AHED;
- Access to AHED-related IAG;
- Factors relating to Service background, that supported the journey to AHED;
- Factors relating to Service background, that presented as a challenge to the journey to AHED; and
- Opportunities to improve the journey to AHED.

Engagement with AHED

- Funding AHED and degree fees;
- Pre-AHED qualifications;
- Factors relating to Service background that supported engagement with AHED;
- Factors relating to Service background that presented as a challenge to engagement with AHED;
- Opportunities to improve engagement with AHED; and
- Engagement with HE, where relevant.

APPENDIX 10

Organisational representation amongst consultees invited to comment on draft recommendations:

Organisation representation invited to comment on draft recommendations	Feedback received
AVA	Yes
HEI Widening Participation	Yes
H4H Careers Recovery	Yes
Access Provider	Yes
FEI Careers Guidance	Yes
Service Family Federations	Yes
HIVE	No
CTP	No
CTP Assist	No
Service 2nd Line Resettlement Providers	Yes
Service 1st Line Resettlement providers	No
Service Personnel Recovery Unit	No
Service Education Centre	Yes



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