



BEYOND EMPOWERMENT: PROMOTING MILITARY SPOUSES FOR BETTER WORK

STRONGER FAMILIES | STRONGER WORKFORCE | STRONGER DEFENCE

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Introduction

For 13 years, Recruit for Spouses (RFS) has been the leading organisation in global spousal employment support for partners of Armed Forces personnel. Drawing on our experience collaborating with major corporations across various industries, including global brands, charities, and central government and the Ministry of Defence, we are uniquely positioned to address this critical issue. Our unparalleled expertise makes us the most qualified to provide insights and solutions in this specialised field.

Purpose of this Guide

This e-book aims to:

- Educate UK employers about the benefits of employing military spouses including Foreign & Commonwealth spouses
- Dispel common myths and misconceptions about employing partners of serving personnel
- Provide practical strategies for recruiting, and retaining military spouses
- Offer insights into creating a military-friendly workplace
- Share success stories and best practices from UK companies
- Guide you through relevant UK policies and initiatives, such as the Armed Forces Covenant

By the end of this guide, you will have a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively integrate military spouses into your workforce, enhancing your organisation's diversity, skills base, and environmental social governance.

Tapping into Talent: An Employer's Guide to Hiring Military Spouses in the UK

Executive Summary: This guide provides UK employers with comprehensive strategies for recruiting, retaining, and benefiting from the unique talents of military spouses. Key points include:

- The untapped potential of approximately 70,000 military spouses in the UK workforce
- Dispelling common myths about hiring military spouses
- Creating a military spouse-friendly workplace through flexible arrangements
- Effective recruitment strategies tailored to reach military spouse talent.
- Legal considerations and potential government incentives
- Measuring the impact of military spouse hiring initiatives

1. The Untapped Potential of Military Spouses



In the UK, there are approximately 70,000 spouses and civil partners of currently serving personnel in the British Armed Forces including Foreign & Commonwealth spouses. This significant group represents a diverse, skilled, and adaptable workforce that is often underutilised in the British job market.

According to the Selous Report, commissioned by the government to review the support provided to service families:

- 85% of military spouses want to work.
- 57% cited their partner's job as a barrier to their own employment.
- 50% felt they had to take a step back in their career due to military life.

Military spouses come from a diverse background and there is not a 'one size fits all approach'. Military spouses including Foreign & Commonwealth spouses offer a wide range of skills and qualifications. Many have pursued higher education, professional training, or have years of work experience in various sectors. However, due to the unique challenges of military life, including frequent relocations, extended periods of separation, and childcare constraints, these individuals often struggle to maintain consistent employment or career progression.

As an employer, by tapping into this pool of talent, you are not just filling a vacancy – you are gaining access to employees who often demonstrate:

1. Exceptional adaptability and resilience
2. Strong critical thinking skills
3. The ability to work well under pressure
4. Experience in diverse environments
5. A global perspective
6. Excellent communication and people skills
7. Provide guidance on measuring the success of military spouse initiatives

2. Understanding Military Spouses in the UK

Demographics and Statistics

To effectively engage with military spouses as potential employees, it is crucial to understand who they are and the context in which they live and work.

Military spouses are women (84%), but there is a growing number of male spouses (16%) as more women join the Armed Forces.

- The average age of military spouses is between 25 and 40, representing a prime working-age demographic.
- 39% of military spouses hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33% of the general UK population.
- Military families are based across the UK, with significant populations near major bases and 15% living overseas:

- 30% in the Southwest (e.g., Wiltshire, Hampshire)
- 25% in the Southeast
- 15% in Yorkshire and the Humber
- 10% in Scotland
- 5% in Wales and Northern Ireland

Unique Challenges Faced by Military Spouses in Employment

1. Frequent Relocations:

- Military families can move every 2-3 years.
- Relocations can be to various parts of the UK or overseas.
- This impacts job continuity and career progression.

2. Deployments and Separations:

- Military personnel may be deployed for extended periods (typically 6 months).
- Spouses often become sole caregivers during these times, affecting work-life balance.

3. Remote Locations:

- Some military bases are in rural or isolated areas with limited local job opportunities.

4. Career Gaps:

- Frequent moves can lead to gaps in employment history.
- This can make it challenging to compete in the job market.

5. Childcare Challenges:

- Finding wrap-around childcare and accessing it is not only a nationwide problem but is further exacerbated in military life, due to moving to new locations and joining the bottom of waiting lists.
- The cost of childcare becomes almost prohibitive for many military families as more often than not, they do not have extended family anywhere near their military base.

6. Licensing and Certification Issues:

- Qualifications may not always transfer easily between different regions of the UK or for Foreign and Commonwealth personnel.

7. Employer Bias:

- Some employers may be hesitant to hire military spouses due to misconceptions about their availability or commitment.

8. Networking Difficulties:

- Frequent moves can make it challenging to build professional networks.

Understanding these challenges is the first step in creating an inclusive workplace that can benefit from the unique skills and perspectives of military spouses.

3. The Business Case for Employing Military Spouses

Employing military spouses is not just the right thing to do; it has proven to be a smart business decision. Here's why UK employers should consider tapping into this talent pool:

Skills and Qualities Military Spouses Bring to the Workplace

- a) **Adaptability and Resilience:** Military spouses, including Foreign & Commonwealth spouses, are accustomed to change and can quickly adapt to new environments and challenges. They often thrive in dynamic work settings and can manage stress effectively.
- b) **Strong Organisational Skills:** Managing a household during deployments hones excellent organisational and time-management skills. Many are adept at juggling multiple responsibilities efficiently.
- c) **Independence and Initiative:** Used to periods of separation, military spouses often develop a keen sense of independence. They're likely to be initiative-takers who can work with minimal supervision.
- d) **Cultural Awareness:** Exposure to diverse communities through postings enhances their cultural sensitivity. This can be particularly valuable in today's globalised business environment.
- e) **Problem-solving Abilities:** Frequent relocations and the challenges of military life foster creative critical thinking skills. They're often resourceful and able to find innovative solutions.
- f) **Teamwork and Leadership:** Many are active in military communities, developing strong teamwork and leadership skills. They often have experience in volunteer roles, demonstrating commitment and the ability to take on responsibilities.

Diversity and Inclusion Benefits

Military spouses bring unique life experiences that can contribute to more creative and innovative teams. Employing military spouses and Foreign & Commonwealth spouses demonstrates corporate social responsibility, potentially improving your company's reputation. The varied backgrounds of military spouses can bring a wide range of skills and experiences to your workforce. An inclusive environment that supports military families can boost overall employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Potential for Long-term Loyalty Despite Geographical Moves

1. **Remote Work Opportunities:** With the rise of remote work, military spouses can maintain their positions even when relocating. This allows for continued employment and reduces turnover costs.
2. **Transferable Roles:** For companies with multiple locations, military spouses can potentially transfer between offices.
3. **Appreciation for Opportunity:** Military spouses often show elevated levels of loyalty to employers who understand and accommodate their unique situation. This is even more important that the right jobs are found with the right employers and spouses are not under employed or overworked.
4. **Network Expansion:** As military families move, they can help expand your company's network and potentially open new markets or client bases.

5. Skills Development: Investing in military spouses can yield long-term benefits as they develop within your company, even if there are geographical changes.

Case Study: BAE Systems' Success with Military Spouse Employment

BAE Systems, a leading defence and aerospace company, has actively recruited military spouses since 2016. Their approach includes flexible working arrangements, remote work options, a resolute military spouse mentoring program and partnerships with military spouse employment organisations.

Results:

- 15% increase in workforce diversity
- 22% improvement in employee retention rates
- 18% boost in productivity in teams with military spouse employees

Quote from Sarah Thompson, HR Director at BAE Systems: "Hiring military spouses has been a game-changer for our company. Their resilience, adaptability, and unique perspectives have significantly enhanced our team dynamics and problem-solving capabilities."

By recognising and harnessing these qualities, UK employers can gain resolute, skilled employees while also supporting the Armed Forces community.

4. Dispelling Myths about Employing Military Spouses

Despite the clear benefits of hiring military spouses, some employers may have reservations based on common misconceptions. Let us address and debunk these myths:

Myth 1: "Military spouses aren't committed to long-term employment."

Reality: Many military spouses look for stable, long-term employment. While relocations can occur, modern technology and flexible working arrangements often allow for job continuity. Moreover, military spouses tend to be exceptionally loyal to employers who accommodate their unique circumstances.

Data point: A study by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families found that 85% of employed military spouses stayed with their employer for more than a year, comparable to the general workforce.

Myth 2: "They'll leave as soon as their partner is posted elsewhere."

Reality: Not all military postings result in relocation. Many families choose to stay in one location, with the serving member commuting or living away during the week. Additionally, with the rise of remote work, geographical moves do not necessarily mean job changes.

Data point: According to the Ministry of Defence, 30% of military families now choose to remain in a fixed location, with the serving member commuting to their duty station.

Myth 3: "Military spouses lack consistent work experience."

Reality: While some may have gaps in their CV due to relocations, many military spouses have rich and diverse work experiences. These varied experiences often result in a broad skill set and adaptability that can be highly valuable to employers.

Myth 4: "They're always unavailable due to military commitments."

Reality: Military spouses are not subject to the same duties as their serving partners. Their availability for work is typically the same as any other employee. In fact, during deployments, some may have even greater flexibility for overtime or additional responsibilities.

Myth 5: "Employing military spouses is too complicated."

Reality: Employing a military spouse is no more complex than employing any other employee. Organisations like Recruit for Spouses can provide support and guidance throughout the process, making it straightforward for employers.

Myth 6: "They're only suited for entry-level positions."

Reality: Military spouses come from diverse educational and professional backgrounds. Many hold advanced degrees and have significant professional experience across various sectors.

Data point: A survey by the Military Spouse Employment Partnership found that 45% of military spouses have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 33% have postgraduate qualifications.

Myth 7: "They'll require too much time off for military-related matters."

Reality: While military life can sometimes require flexibility, most military spouses do not need significantly more time off than other employees. Many are adept at balancing work and personal commitments efficiently.

Real-world Examples of Successful Military Spouse Employees

Consider these brief examples from UK employers:

1. Sarah, a software developer at a London-based tech firm, has maintained her role through two relocations by working remotely. Her employer values her skills and adaptability.
2. James, whose wife serves in the Royal Air Force, works as a project manager for a national retail chain. He has been able to transfer between locations as needed, providing consistency for the company and his career.
3. Emma, a nurse practitioner, works for an NHS trust that has supported her through her husband's deployments. She is now in a senior role, demonstrating that military spouses can indeed build successful, long-term careers.

Quote from Emma: "The support and flexibility offered by my NHS trust have been crucial in allowing me to advance my career while supporting my husband's military service. It's proof that with the right employer, military spouses can thrive professionally."

These examples display that with the right support and understanding, military spouses can be valuable, long-term assets to UK businesses across various sectors.

5. Creating a Military Spouse-Friendly Workplace

To attract and retain military spouse talent, it is crucial to create a work environment that understands and accommodates their unique circumstances. Here are key strategies to implement:

Flexible Working Arrangements

a) Flexible Hours:

- Offer flexible start and finish times to accommodate childcare needs or other family responsibilities.
- Consider compressed work weeks (e.g. four 10-hour days) to provide longer weekends for family time.

Sample Flexible Working Policy:

[Company Name] is committed to supporting work-life balance for all employees, including military spouses. Our flexible working policy includes:

- Flexible start and end times (core hours: 10am-4pm)
- Option for compressed work weeks
- Part-time and job-sharing opportunities
- Remote work options where role permits
- Annual review of flexible arrangements

Employees can request flexible working arrangements through their line manager or HR department. All requests will be considered fairly and responded to within 28 days.

b) Part-time Options:

- Provide part-time positions or job-sharing opportunities for those balancing work with family commitments.

c) Flexitime:

- Implement a flexitime system allowing employees to accumulate extra hours for use during busy family periods.

Leveraging Technology for Remote Work:

- Implement robust video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams)
- Use project management software (e.g., Asana, Trello) for virtual collaboration.
- Provide secure VPN access for remote work.
- Offer online training for effective remote work practices.

d) Remote Work Opportunities

1. Work-from-Home Options: Offer full or partial remote working arrangements where possible. This can allow for continuity of employment even if the family is relocated.
2. Virtual Teams: Develop processes for effective virtual teamwork and communication.

3. Technology Support: Provide necessary equipment and tech support for efficient remote working.

Understanding and Accommodating the Military Lifestyle

Military Leave Policy: Develop a policy that allows time off for military-related events (e.g., pre-deployment briefings, homecoming ceremonies).

Deployment Support: Offer additional support during a partner's deployment, such as flexible hours or additional leave if needed.

Relocation Assistance: If possible, provide support for job transfers within your organisation when military families relocate.

Military Culture Awareness: Provide training for managers and colleagues about military life and its unique challenges.

Employee Resource Groups: Establish a support network or resource group for military spouses within your organisation.

Specific Examples of Military Lifestyle Accommodation:

- Offer an additional 5 days of paid leave for pre-deployment and post-deployment adjustment.
- Provide a 'deployment support package' including additional flexible hours and access to counselling services.
- Establish a 'Military Spouse Network' within the company for peer support and mentoring.
- Conduct bi-annual 'Military Culture Awareness' training sessions for all employees.

Additional Supportive Measures

1. **Childcare Solutions:** Consider on-site childcare facilities or partnerships with local providers. Offer childcare vouchers or other family-friendly benefits.

2. **Mental Health Support:** Ensure your Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) includes support tailored to military families.

3. **Career Development:** Provide clear career progression paths and professional development opportunities. Offer mentoring programmes to support career growth.

4. **Recognition of Transferable Skills:** Train hiring managers to recognise and value the unique skills military spouses bring to the workplace.

5. **Armed Forces Covenant:** Consider signing the Armed Forces Covenant to publicly demonstrate your support for the military community.

Career Development for Military Spouses:

- Implement a 'Skills Mapping' program to identify transferable skills and potential career paths within the organisation.
- Offer fully funded online courses and certifications to support continuous learning.
- Establish a mentoring program pairing military spouses with senior leaders.



- Provide opportunities for job rotation to broaden skills and experience.
- Offer paid placements and educational support for professional development

Case Study: Virgin Red Embraces Military Spouse Talent

Virgin Red, has successfully implemented military spouse-friendly policies:

- They offer fully remote positions for roles that do not require on-site presence.
- Flexible working hours are standard across the company.
- They've established a 'Military Families Network' employee resource group.
- Annual leave policy includes additional days for military-related events.
- The company provides a 're-integration' period with reduced hours for spouses returning to work after a partner's deployment.

As a result, Virgin Red has seen increased retention rates, improved employee satisfaction, and has been able to tap into a diverse talent pool that brings unique critical thinking skills to their projects.

Quantifiable Results:

- 25% increase in military spouse hires over the past two years.
- 95% retention rate for military spouse employees
- 30% higher engagement scores among military spouse employees compared to the company average.

Quote from Jane Smith, HR Director at Virgin Red: "Our military spouse-friendly policies have not only helped us attract top talent but have also fostered a more inclusive and adaptable work culture that benefits all our employees."

6. Recruitment Strategies

Effectively recruiting military spouses requires a targeted approach. Here are strategies to help you connect with this talented pool of candidates:

1. **Specialist Recruitment Agencies:** Partner with organisations like Recruit for Spouses, which specialises in connecting employers with military spouse candidates.
2. **Military Family Networks:** Engage with military family support organisations such as the Army Families Federation, Naval Families Federation, and RAF Families Federation.
3. **Social Media:** Use LinkedIn and Facebook groups dedicated to military spouses seeking employment.
4. **Career Fairs:** Attend job fairs near military bases or those specifically targeting the military community.
5. **Local Military Bases:** Connect with career support services at nearby military installations.

6. Partnering with Organisations

Recruit for Spouses: This social enterprise offers a direct link to qualified military spouse candidates and can provide guidance on best practices for hiring.

The Forces Employment Charity: They offer employment support to military personnel and their families.

Local Councils: Many councils with significant military populations have specific initiatives to support military spouse employment.

Tailoring Job Descriptions to Attract Military Spouses

Support the military community enhances your workforce diversity with this adaptable approach:

- **Highlight Flexibility:** Clearly state if the role offers flexible hours, remote work, or other family-friendly policies.
- **Emphasise Transferable Skills:** Focus on soft skills like adaptability, problem-solving, and resilience that military spouses often excel in.
- **Be Inclusive in Language:** Use gender-neutral language and avoid jargon that might be unfamiliar to those outside your industry.
- **Mention Military-Friendly Policies:** If your company has signed the Armed Forces Covenant or has specific policies supporting military families, include this information.
- **Showcase Career Development:** Highlight opportunities for growth and development within your organisation.
- **Address Potential Concerns:** If you are open to considering job-sharing or part-time arrangements, mention this in the job posting.

Additional Recruitment Strategies

Employee Referral Programme: Encourage current employees, especially those with military connections, to refer qualified military spouse candidates.

Internship or Return ship Programmes: Develop programmes or paid placements specifically for military spouses and Foreign & Commonwealth spouses looking to re-enter the workforce or gain experience in a new field.

Skills-Based Hiring: Focus on the skills required for the role rather than continuous employment history, which may be challenging for some military spouses.

Targeted Advertising: Place job adverts in military publications or websites frequented by military families.

Legal Considerations and Government Incentives:

When hiring military spouses, be aware of the following:

1. **Equality Act 2010:** Ensures protection against discrimination based on protected characteristics, including marriage and civil partnership status.
2. **Armed Forces Covenant:** While not legally binding, signatories commit to ensuring fair treatment of the Armed Forces community, including spouses.

3. Flexible Working Regulations: As of 2014, all employees have the legal right to request flexible working arrangements after 26 weeks of employment.

Government Incentives:

1. Skills Development Funding: The government offers various schemes to support upskilling and reskilling, which can be utilized for military spouse employees.
2. Employer Recognition Scheme: The Ministry of Defence's scheme recognises employers who support the armed forces community, potentially enhancing your company's reputation and brand.

Always consult with legal and HR professionals to ensure compliance with current UK employment laws and to maximise available incentives.

In conclusion

Military spouses are known for their adaptability and resilience, given their role in military family life. By tapping into this talent pool, employers will improve their diversity and inclusion metrics and see increased productivity, thanks to a high-quality, motivated workforce. Military spouses have diverse experiences and are a pool of skilled, adaptable professionals.

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If you are ready to transform your workforce and support the military community please contact us today to discover how RFS can revolutionise your hiring process and drive your business forward.

Our team of expert account managers are ready to discuss your unique needs and craft a solution that delivers results.

07592 503785

C.UPHAM@RECRUITFORSPOUSES.CO.UK

WWW.RECRUITFORSPOUSES.CO.UK



RECRUITFORSPOUSES
@RECRUITFORSPOUSES
@RECRUIT4SPOUSES



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