

Defence Cuts may Boost Business

says *Hugh Andrée*, Founder of ForceSelect



There is no doubt that the cuts announced by the Government are going to have a devastating impact on our Armed Forces.

With our serving personnel having been called into action in Libya, the timing was less than ideal.

The Royal Air Force has been hit hard and faces losing thousands of personnel from its total under SDSR with the likelihood of further reductions in 2015. When the situation is so serious that the RAF has had to halt the teaching of trainee pilots so instructors can be drafted on to the front-line and airshow pilots have been withdrawn from displays, one gets the sense that something is not quite right.

I set up ForceSelect just over a year ago to provide a specialist recruitment service for Forces' leavers looking for support and guidance as they moved into civvy street. Having been an Army officer for a decade myself, and finding I had little support when I finished my commission, I knew that there was an opportunity to help the men and women who have served their country.

Little did I know quite what dramatic cuts would be made to the Armed Forces and I have to say the scale of the cutbacks have left me shocked. In general terms these cuts will reduce operational effectiveness. With the rebalancing of strength, to be achieved by 2015, could it result in our Armed Forces becoming little more than a part-time fighting

force as more flexible terms of engagement are introduced?

As the founder of a UK military Service leaver recruitment consultancy, I should of course be delighted by this news, but I am concerned that we will simply be unable to meet our commitments effectively or act as global custodians when the need arises.

Businesses are set to gain

If there is a positive in this sad news, it is that British businesses will benefit from the wealth of talent that will become available from the Armed Forces. Service leavers offer a raft of transferable skills. They are efficient, reliable, disciplined and enthusiastic, working well both in teams and as individuals. Of course their skills and experience vary according to branch or trade unit, squadron or regiment but that is in their favour: the next wave of Service leavers will be able to fill positions as engineers, aviation specialists, logisticians, project managers, operational and business managers.

Here we have placed candidates in roles as diverse as engineers, film extras, investment bankers and marine experts, and have a number of partnerships in place with companies such as UPS, British Gas and JP Morgan – all committed to providing fulfilling second careers for Service leavers. We also have a mentoring scheme in place to support and advise Service leavers about the more pastoral issues they may face concerning general welfare – things they would have taken for granted when serving.

A need to be realistic

Of course one of our roles as advisors is to make sure that Service leavers appreciate the adjustments they may have to make when transitioning into civilian life. It is important that they have realistic expectations with regard to salary levels because earnings and other benefits may not be what they have been led to believe.

Likewise, sometimes in order to secure the job that they want, particularly in this economic downturn, they need to realise that they may have to travel or even relocate. For the

majority, who have led a more transient lifestyle than most, this should not present too much of a challenge.

Service leavers also need to ensure that they self-promote and don't undersell the skills they have – and it's our job at ForceSelect to translate their military experience into civilian speak. The use of Enhanced Learning Credits (ELCs) is all the more important because they enable Service leavers to gain qualifications recognised in the civilian world prior to leaving.

One man's loss is another man's gain

I am meeting with a senior RAF figure next week to discuss employment opportunities for 200 RAF trainee pilots. UK companies should see this as an opportunity to recruit some of the best young talent this country has to offer in engineering, aeronautics and the like. ForceSelect has already seen a significant increase in candidates at all levels – from Privates to 3 star Generals – the Ministry of Defence's loss is the private and third sector's gain.

Isaac Awoniyi, former Squadron Leader, RAF

Isaac Awoniyi studied mechanical engineering at university on a RAF bursary. In the RAF he worked on strategic project management with a focus on introducing new air transport and air-to-air refuelling aircraft to the RAF fleet. His last appointment was a secondment to industry, working as Fleet Manager for the Hercules C130J, C130K and TriStar aircraft. He was deployed twice on Op TELIC. Isaac resigned his commission early to seek a new challenge in the City. He said: "I wouldn't swap my time in the RAF for anything. I decided it was time to seek a career change and new intellectual challenges. A friend recommended ForceSelect and I attended a seminar in London. I met the staff and found them to be hugely enthusiastic, extremely professional and driven to assist Service leavers. They understood the peculiarities of my situation and I would absolutely recommend ForceSelect to anyone leaving the Armed Forces."

To find out more visit www.forceselect.com

