Image licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0

A new frontier for diversity in the digital workforce

Why veterans are the UK's biggest untapped resource for tackling the digital skills crisis.

Report

WITHYOUWITHME

Contents

Foreword **3**

Digital skills in the UK **5**

The state of play for equity, diversity and inclusion **6**

A new way of thinking about veteran talent **8**

The untapped potential of veteran workers **9**

The case for veterans to choose IT 10

A rallying cry to UK employers 11

Success stories from the 15,000 Futures Initiative **12**

Who is WithYouWithMe **15**

Sir James Everard

Former Deputy Allied Supreme Commander NATO

Since the end of the Cold War, the British Army has been engaged in a number of conflicts, including Afghanistan and Iraq. While operations like these are demanding at an individual and collective level, they are also the reason why so many good men and women join and flourish in the Army – risk and reward, challenge and opportunity.

At some stage everyone leaves the Army, and as these soon-to-be and existing veterans weigh up their options for the future, many face difficulties finding gainful employment with genuine growth opportunities.

UK employers appreciate the core values that our soldiers live by – courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment.

While it's well-known that veterans have transferrable skills, they're often overlooked because they can't be fully captured on a one-page CV which too-readily focuses on academic qualifications and past work experience.

Meanwhile across the UK, organisations are struggling to find and recruit people with the technological skills needed to meet the demands of the digital age.

If they look with fresh eyes at their workforce planning, they will discover that the roles they so badly need to fill do not necessarily require someone who is already qualified.

It's time to take a different approach – to look elsewhere – to find talent in areas previously overlooked and instead of expecting years of experience, facilitate training programs to rapidly develop digital skills.

It is amazing how much untapped and underutilised talent exists in our society – especially amongst veterans. And with 140 hours of supported, self-paced training, many can easily come far enough to fill a critical skills gap – and then grow stronger over time.

Both veteran unemployment and the digital skills gap are challenges social impact organisation WithYouWithMe has been working to address across Australia, Canada and the UK. They have already provided specialised aptitude testing to more than 24,000 veterans worldwide.

> The result, **85% demonstrate intermediate or above technology skills** and benefit from core attributes such as pattern recognition and abstract reasoning which are valuable contributors to success in digital roles.

Specific to the UK market, this report looks at the many reasons veterans or those looking to transition out of the Armed Forces are the perfect candidates to retrain and resolve the digital skills gap. With the right approach, organisations and government agencies can address their shortages, while also improving prospects for the UK's servicemen and women and their families.

James Everard commissioned in 1983, joining the 17th/21st Lancers in Germany on the Chieftain Main Battle Tank. Having commanded at every level – including the Queen's Royal Lancers, 20th Armoured Brigade, 3rd (UK) Division and the UK Field Army – he ended his career in September 2020 as the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (and Operation Commander European Union Operation ALTHEA, Bosnia-in-Herzegovina).

James Everard is President of ABF The Soldiers' Charity and took up the appointment of Lead Senior Mentor for NATO Allied Command Operations in January 2021. He is committed to finding a sustainable solution to the digital skills challenge in Western militaries.

Digital skills in the UK

The digital skills shortage costs the country's economy an estimated **£63bn** in lost potential GDP[1]

As digital technologies become increasingly embedded in all aspects of personal and professional life, the UK's economy, national security and future prosperity rely on the ability to develop, and leverage, these technologies.

For the organisations that drive success in the digital realm, the single biggest constraining factor to growth is a lack of digital skills[2]. The two main factors contributing to the shortage are: a gap in the skills required amongst the existing workforce and a lack of properly trained individuals to fill digital roles.

In both instances, talent exists, but organisations need to shift the focus away from the 'talent war' and instead explore new avenues to develop digital capabilities, including tapping into previously overlooked areas of society and investing in individuals to build their skills.

Currently, the methods that most organisations use to screen new candidates – like CVs, reference checks and cover letters – are fundamentally flawed. A person's potential extends far beyond their experience or the opportunities they've previously been given.

These processes contribute to maintaining barriers to employment experienced by individuals from underserved and overlooked areas of society. While this report focuses on Armed Forces veterans and their families, these barriers also impact neurodivergent individuals, refugees, youth and former first responders.

Increasingly organisations are working to remove these barriers and implement policies to drive equity, diversity and inclusion in the workplace. While the research shows great strides have been made, in the UK, there is still work to be done.

[1,2] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (2022). UK Digital Strategy. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-digital-strategy/uk-digital-strategy

The state of play for Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in UK organisations

Alongside YouGov, WithYouWithMe conducted an online research project in 2022 measuring the state of play for equity, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) in the UK. Respondents were comprised of a national sample of 536 British middle managers and above from organisations with 20 or more employees.

The research found overwhelmingly that businesses and government agencies are on the right track – and understand that equity, diversity and inclusion are more than just human resources buzzwords. Rather, they are critical in building an engaged workforce that's more productive and innovative, and less likely to leave, than their homogenous counterparts and as a result, organisations are making efforts to increase ED&I in the workplace.

While much headway has been made, there remains many opportunities for workplaces to scratch below the surface and institute modest changes that could have a significant impact on making their workplaces more welcoming for diverse individuals.

Click to read the report

In particular, our research discovered that:

- The methods most organisations use to screen candidates can put diverse individuals at a disadvantage. CVs, reference checks, and cover letters, rather than assessments like psychometric or aptitude tests, are still widely used by most organisations.
- While some workplaces (**49%**) have mandated training on inclusive hiring, we identified significant gaps in the subject matter covered through training and significant disparities between large and medium-sized organisations.
- Encouragingly, **70%** of managers report that their organisations are making efforts to accommodate diverse candidates during the hiring process.
- Even more encouraging, **84%** of workplaces with written policies on ED&I are engaging or consulting with staff when it comes to reviewing and updating them.

While British organisations have made great strides in actively working to increase ED&I when recruiting for roles, to further this work, we recommend:

Expanded applicant screening:

Rather than sticking solely to traditional methods of screening candidates, like CVs, cover letters, and reference checks, we recommend replacing or incorporating psychometric or aptitude testing and expanding the definition of 'past experience'.

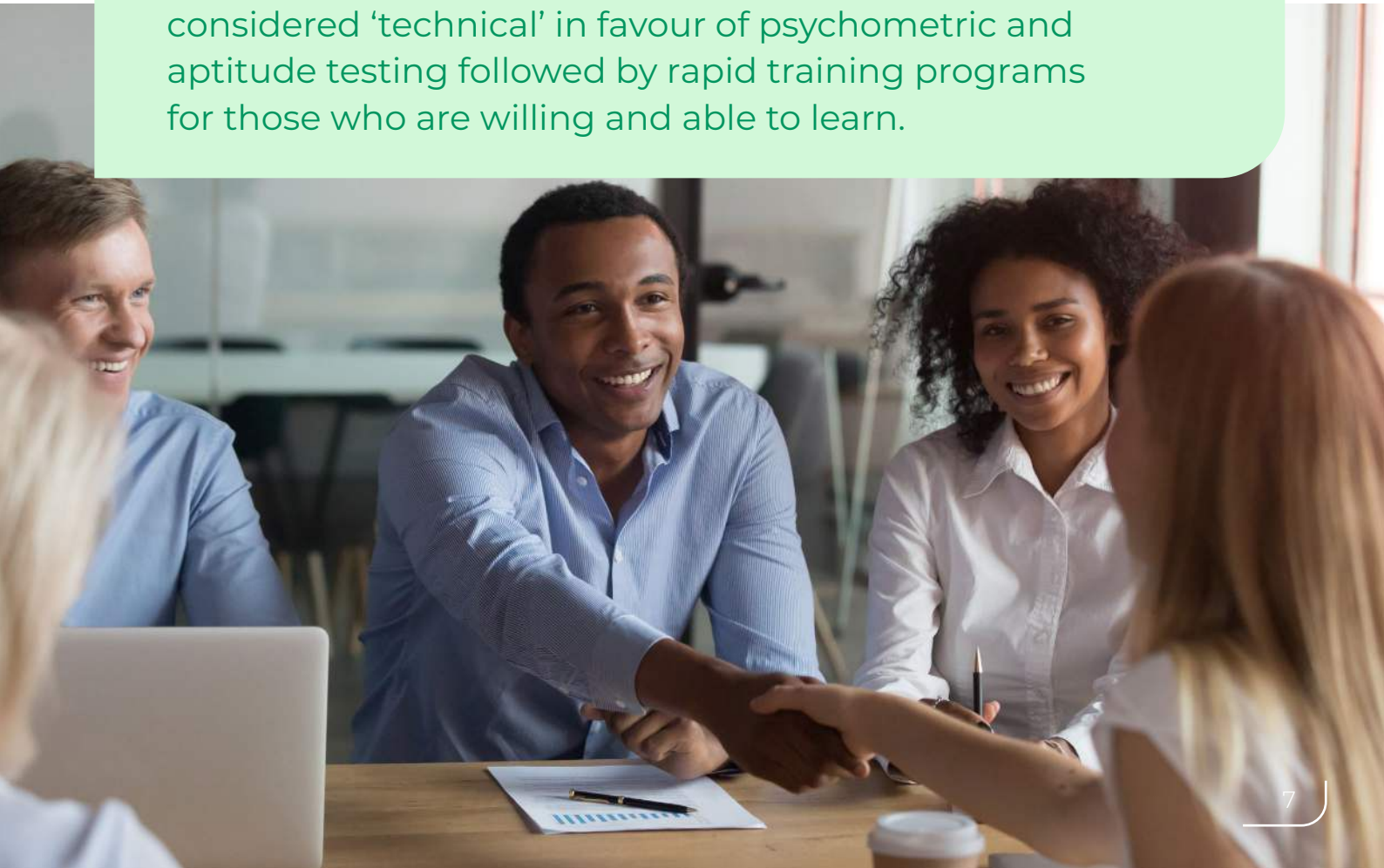
Accommodating for differences:

Working with candidates to use creative solutions where necessary, like video interviews when physical access is an issue, and putting processes in place for applicants who require assistance, will provide a more inclusive hiring experience.

Broadening recruitment training:

For individuals who are screening and interacting with candidates, mandated training that encompasses a range of core diversity areas like cultural sensitivity, veteran affairs, disability, LGBTQIA+, and unconscious bias, is critical.

In the digital age, it's possible to do away with traditional 'CV-led' hiring for many roles that have too-long been considered 'technical' in favour of psychometric and aptitude testing followed by rapid training programs for those who are willing and able to learn.



A new way of thinking about veteran talent

Every year in the UK, 15,000 servicemen and women leave the Armed Forces and return to civilian life. Despite developing broad skillsets and unique capabilities during their service, for many of these individuals, finding a sustainable career becomes an ongoing challenge.

> The problem isn't that veterans aren't being hired at all, rather that organisations are employing them in roles that are low-paid and don't offer career progression – an approach that sees their potential go to waste.

More than half of the 700,000 veterans in employment in the UK are currently sitting in low paid or routine occupations. And while 71% of medium and large organisations say they would consider employing veterans, only 39% would employ someone with no industry experience[3].

Despite these statistics, organisations that do hire veterans are overwhelmingly positive about the value they contribute. 72% with veteran recruitment programs would recommend others employ veterans in their workforce and 53% of organisations who have employed veterans say they tend to be promoted more quickly than the workforce in general[4].

These findings demonstrate a large and mostly overlooked opportunity for veterans to enter the digital marketplace where – despite what traditional hiring practices say – the necessary skills for a broad range of roles can be taught without a degree.

Additionally, these roles are in high demand, and with the technology sector continuing to expand year-on-year, opportunities for growth and career progression are unmatched in other sectors.

[3,4] Deloitte UK. (2016). Veterans work: Recognising the potential of ex-service personnel. https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/about-deloitte-uk/articles/veterans-work.html

The untapped potential of the veteran workforce

In a first-of-its kind study into veteran aptitude for the Information Technology industry, WithYouWithMe analysed two years' worth of psychometric and aptitude data from the testing of more than 2,000 UK veterans.

> *What they found was that more than 85% of UK veterans demonstrate intermediate or above technology skills, without any supplemental training.*

One third (33.7%) also scored highly in digital symbol coding which assesses the ability to learn a new coding system and use it in context. From a skills perspective, this relates to information encoding and decoding and sequencing – all of which are sort after traits in Software Developers and Data Engineers.

Overall, UK veterans scored higher than the broader population in abstract reasoning which is the best indicator of fluid intelligence and the ability to learn new things quickly.

UK veterans were most commonly matched to careers in project management, operations and cyber security response – likely a result of their existing skills in managing complex situations with intuitive smarts and problem-solving under pressure.

For any organisations working in the defence sector – or any sector where employees handle sensitive information – veterans are also the largest source of security cleared talent in the UK.

85% of veterans demonstrate intermediate or above tech skills.[1]

One third of UK veterans scored highly in digital symbol coding (33.7%).[2]

Veterans scored higher than the general population in abstract reasoning.[3]

UK veterans most commonly matched with careers in project management, operations and cyber incident response.[4]

For organisations who work in defence and national security, veterans are the largest source of security cleared talent in the UK.

There are around 700,000 veterans in employment in the UK and over half of them have jobs in low paid or routine occupations that don't make use of their full skills. [5]

While 71% of medium and large organisations say they would consider employing veterans, only 39% would employ someone with no industry experience. [6]

If your organisation needs digital talent with these skillsets, connect with WithYouWithMe.

[1,2,3,4] Potential platform psychometric and aptitude testing data, UK veteran users, 2023 [WYWM].

[5,6] https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/about-deloitte-uk/articles/veterans-work.html [Deloitte].

The case for veterans to choose IT

Alongside, veterans' demonstrable aptitude for tech, digital career pathways also offer valuable benefits that are well-suited to both veterans and their families.

Where some veterans may be experiencing physical injuries or mental health conditions, many digital careers offer enhanced flexibility, including remote working and having no set work times. This means individuals can maintain a career while also meeting the demands of their personal lives – whether that involves attending appointments, dedicating time to exercise and other positive impact activities or looking after their families.

IT roles in the UK also typically offer competitive salaries, and once you're 'in', career progression for many roles is skills-based. Veterans who are motivated to enhance their earning potential can build capabilities through online training programs – many of which are also delivered digitally.

A rallying cry to UK employers

Shortly after signing the UK's Armed Forces Covenant, WithYouWithMe launched the 15,000 Futures initiative – a rallying cry to all UK employers to support servicemen and women through their transition by offering them opportunities to undertake digital roles.

Once a commitment to hire veterans is made by an organisation, WithYouWithMe provides training to ensure candidates are capable, confident and job ready.

In the short time this initiative has been running, WithYouWithMe has garnered support from several leading organisations including Capita, Northrop Grumman, Atos, Fujitsu, Leonardo UK, Leidos and SII UK.

> "A significant amount of our business in the UK is in the public sector, therefore, by reflecting the diversity of the citizens we serve, we can deliver services that meet the needs of all of our end-customers... The beauty of WithYouWithMe's solution is that diversity is built in from the start. A lot of recruitment partners provide skilled people first and then consider diversity afterwards. WithYouWithMe gives us skilled people who happen to come from under-represented groups."
>
> *Julie Adamson*
> *Social Value Solutions Lead, Atos*

As of February 2023, more than 100 veterans have either been placed in new IT roles with an average salary of £45,000 or, are actively undertaking free training for an available role.

Success stories from the 15,000 Futures Initiative

Northrop Grumman

Through the 15,000 Futures program, Northrop Grumman UK is seeking new talent to support its cyber and intelligence business within the UK's National Security Solutions division. Leveraging WithYouWithMe's platform known as 'Potential', ten individuals were identified from a diverse talent pool that could fill in-demand roles.

In August 2022, WithYouWithMe deployed its first members of the 'squad' of ten to Northrop Grumman's cyber and intelligence business – the organisation's biggest business unit. Roles include Business Analysts, as well as Software and Java Developers, based in both London and Manchester.

NORTHROP GRUMMAN

"The technology and digital skills divide is one that we are determined to bridge as it's key to our mission to secure the UK and our allies' defence.

We are passionate about attracting the broadest possible range of people and encouraging diversity of thought, experience and background to help solve our customer's toughest challenges across space, air, land, sea and cyber, globally."

Nick Chaffey

Chief Executive
Northrop Grumman UK, Europe and Middle East

Other leading organisations have also adopted a similar approach to find and nurture veteran talent.

Capita FUJITSU Sii

LEONARDO leidos Atos

Meet Alex

Alex is a British Army veteran who also worked with the UK Ministry of Defence. He began his military career as a Junior Communications Engineer and won the Brigade Commander's Commendation for Exemplary Operational Service from the UK Ministry of Defence in 2010.

From there, he held various positions such as Communications Systems Operator and Electronic Countermeasure Specialist. In 2016, Alex shifted to a full-time position as an Information Technology Project Engineer with the Ministry of Defence, where he remained until his 2017 discharge.

After leaving the Ministry of Defence, Alex worked in several industries including the steel industry, personal training and food delivery to make ends meet. While looking for more stable work, Alex was interacting with the UK veteran community where he was introduced to WithYouWithMe. He appreciated that they were offering free courses that he could complete in his own time and earn industry-recognised certifications.

He initially started training in Digital Project Management, and upon completion, received a Project Officer Certification. From there he was offered an interview with Accenture and encouraged to complete the Low Code Development learning pathway.

Alex is now a certified Pega System Architect and a Pega Business Architect working for Accenture UK.

"I left the military with a medical diagnosis of PTSD. I had no resettlement training. I didn't have any direction.

I was in a job where I was under underemployed, underpaid and I was struggling to find some sort of solution for where I needed to be, and I found WithYouWithMe. They helped me see what my potential was.

They trained me, qualified me, deployed me into a company as a Level 4 Pega Business Architect and now I work for one of the biggest consulting companies in the world, supporting a large government organisation and helping them improve."

Alex Eley
Pega Business Architect, Accenture UK

Meet Babou

Babou Jobe is a technology-minded veteran who served for seven years in the British Armed Forces. During his time in service, he was deployed to Afghanistan and played an instrumental part in the team responsible for managing the British tri-service headquarters' information systems, consolidating all data and IT assets; and repatriating them to the UK upon completion.

After leaving service, Babou discovered WithYouWithMe on LinkedIn. Initially, he thought the pitch was 'too good to be true', but six months later he registered for a call with the Career Success Team.

Babou's psychometric and aptitude tests confirmed that he was a strong candidate for many of the same IT industry roles he had been seeking out for two years. Within a month of engaging WithYouWithMe, Babou was offered a job as a Senior Developer at Northrop Grumman UK as part of the 15,000 Futures initiative.

> *"As an army veteran I feel valued in my role because WithYouWithMe understand what skills a military veteran can bring to an organisation.*
>
> *Not only do they encourage me to personally develop but also provide me with the resources to build my skills and qualifications to another level."*

Babou Jobe
Senior Developer, Northrop Grumman

For more information about 15,000 Futures, or to join the initiative today, visit 15000futures.co.uk

Who is WithYouWithMe?

Mission: Solve veteran underemployment

WithYouWithMe (WYWM) is a social impact organisation working to solve the digital skills crisis while creating a more equitable world.

Spanning the UK, Australia, US and Canada, WithYouWithMe helps individuals from underserved and overlooked communities overcome traditional barriers to employment by providing free access to aptitude and psychometric testing, accredited digital skills training and meaningful career placements.

Using a proprietary technology solution, known as Potential, WithYouWithMe helps organisations do away with the traditional 'CV-led' employment models that disadvantage diverse communities, instead seeking to understand an individual's propensity to be successful in a role based on their personality, aptitude, culture fit and learning style.

Where skills gaps exist, WithYouWithMe offer free training programs – accredited by groups like GCHQ, SFIA and ANSI – for rapid upskilling and job placement into high-value, meaningful careers.

WithYouWithMe's veteran program

WithYouWithMe's veteran program offers all former British Armed Forces servicemen and women and their families free access to aptitude and psychometric testing, streamlined digital skills training and job matching opportunities.

As a veteran-founded organisation, WithYouWithMe recognise veterans' unique capabilities to become proficient at speed, solve complex problems on-the-go and tackle high pressure situations with intuitive smarts.

More than five years of psychometric testing data collected by WithYouWithMe has proven the skills that make veterans successful in a military context can be repurposed for careers in the technology sector.

If your organisation is interested in hiring veteran talent, reach out to WithYouWithMe.

WITHYOUWITHME