

A government-backed initiative providing ex-Service personnel with the tools they need to get into business has now helped nearly 3,000 people over two years. The 'Be the Boss' scheme was set up two years ago with £5m of funding from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and is run by the Royal British Legion. There are 1,420 people currently engaged in the scheme, with 2,905 people having entered the programme since it began. So far 88 businesses including fitness centres, locksmiths and plumbers have received funding and grants. The scheme provides Armed Forces Service leavers with loans and grants to help with the costs of starting and growing a business once they have returned to civilian life. It is also able to give people support, advice and access to business mentors who can give them the expert advice they need. Business and Enterprise Minister Mark Prisk said: "There is a great entrepreneurial spirit among our Armed Forces veterans and the Government is keen to help them develop and grow their business expertise. They have the perfect attributes with great desire and a can-do attitude that is exactly the kind of commitment needed when starting and growing your own business. I have been inspired by many of the success stories that the scheme has delivered over its first two years. I am delighted that the Royal British Legion has committed their long term investment in 'Be the Boss' and will be taking it forward to new levels of success in the future." All ex-Service personnel are able to apply for mixed funding of a 25 per cent grant and 75 per cent loan of up to £7,500 for business start-up costs and £30,000 for existing businesses that want to grow. One of the campaign's success stories is 'State of Mind Fitness' in Hammersmith, London. The gym is run by former Royal Marine Barry O'Connell who has 12 years of active Service experience. Speaking about the scheme Barry said: "Be the Boss' has been so important to the success of my business which has gone from strength to strength. I would recommend that any Service leavers with an entrepreneurial mind look into a business start-up via the Legion's 'Be the Boss' scheme." Chris Simpkins, Director General of the Royal British Legion, said: "The 'Be the Boss' scheme has been a tremendous success in its first two years with a unique onus on equipping our nation's Armed Forces Service leavers with the right tools required for business start-ups. "The Legion is the only Armed Forces charity providing this particular funding, sound business advice, mentoring and future financial forecasts, and we hope to see many more business successes in the coming years." Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans Andrew Robathan said: "I am delighted to see that 3,000 former Service personnel have benefited from 'Be the Boss'. Not only has it helped them make a successful transition into civilian life but they are making use of the wide range of skills they obtained during their career with the Armed Forces. "I hope the success of the scheme inspires any other potential entrepreneurs amongst our former Service personnel to set up their own business." Service leavers are also being encouraged to learn more about existing government support for businesses. This includes gaining access to different channels of finance and getting involved in business mentoring through the Government's 'Mentorsme' portal. And this year the Government is running the 'Business in You' campaign to encourage more people to start or grow their own business throughout 2012 using a range of existing support services. More information is available on the 'Business in You' website. For further information or to register for support please visit the 'Be the Boss' website and/or make use of the 'Be the Boss' dedicated freephone helpline 0800 678 5787.