

White Paper 0

From Transition to Service Provider Identity Adaptation

The conceptual evolution of the Identity After the Uniform research programme

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Executive Summary

This paper explains a conceptual shift in how the Identity After the Uniform research programme frames its subject. The programme has always studied identity disruption connected to military and other uniformed service. As the interview set and the cross-sector coaching pilots have grown, a sharper framing has emerged. Transition is the triggering event. The phenomenon actually under study is identity adaptation: the adaptation that follows exit from, or change within, a trained role in a high-pressure service delivery occupation.

This paper sets out why service provider identity, rather than transition alone and rather than a general claim about human adaptation across the lifespan, is the right organising lens. It is better supported by the published literature and by AURIS's own evidence base than either alternative.

This is a conceptual position paper. It proposes a lens through which the existing research questions are interpreted. It does not itself claim new empirical proof. The interview denominator (25 of 108), the coaching, not clinical positioning, and the disconfirming cases and contradiction register caveats set out in Section 4A all continue to apply to any public reference to the sequence or the framework described here.

1. Where the Programme Started

The programme began with a straightforward premise. Identity disruption during military transition was underserved relative to the practical side of leaving service: housing, finance, CV support, pensions. Early documents and public materials therefore centred on transition, leaving service, and rebuilding purpose after the uniform comes off.

This was a reasonable starting point. It was grounded in Gemma Gardner's own lived experience and in the initial interview cohort, and it remains the reason the research programme is titled Identity After the Uniform.

2. What the Evidence Base Now Suggests

The interview set has grown beyond military service leavers to include police, NHS and ambulance personnel, and the applied pilots have extended to non-military populations. A pattern has become clearer as a result. The populations where identity disruption is most pronounced are not simply uniformed in the literal sense. They share a specific mechanism: they are trained, at length and often formally, into a role delivered under sustained

pressure, in service to the public. The military is one example of this. Policing, fire, ambulance and clinical NHS roles are others.

This is consistent with what Gemma's own hypothesis has been throughout. People are not simply issued a uniform. They are coached and trained into becoming the kind of person who occupies that role, and it is that training process which fuses the role to personal identity. That is why leaving the role, or being unable to enact it as trained, produces identity disruption disproportionate to an ordinary job change.

3. Why Service Provider Identity, Rather Than Transition Alone or Human Adaptation in General

Two alternative reframings were considered and set aside in favour of the service provider frame.

- Transition alone is too narrow. It describes the triggering event, not the longer, often delayed, psychological process that follows it, which several interviews show can take years to surface.
- Human adaptation across the lifespan is too broad. It would fold in bereavement, retirement, redundancy and disability in general, diluting the programme's veteran-first credibility with existing charity partners and stretching the evidence base well beyond what 25 of 108 interviews can support.

Service provider identity sits between the two. It is broad enough to include police, NHS, ambulance, fire and other trained, high-pressure, public-facing roles alongside the military, all of them already represented in the interview set or in active pilot conversations, including with The Ambulance Staff Charity. It is narrow enough to stay anchored in trained-role identity fusion, which is the actual mechanism the evidence and the literature point to.

4. What the Wider Literature Supports

A focused literature review was carried out to test this reframing against established research, independent of AURIS's own data. Three bodies of work are directly relevant.

4.1 Role identity theory

Stryker's identity theory holds that people carry a hierarchy of role identities, and that roles occupying a highly salient, highly committed position in that hierarchy dominate behaviour and self-definition. Roles that are formally trained into, rather than casually occupied, tend to sit at the top of that hierarchy. This is the theoretical basis for treating trained service roles as a distinct category rather than as ordinary employment.

4.2 Direct evidence in comparable service populations

Published research on paramedics has produced a specific four-part role identity model, covering caregiving, thrill-seeking, duty and capacity, used to explain identity-related distress when the role cannot be enacted as trained. Separately, a study of police officers who voluntarily resigned found that the salience of the policing identity itself, not simply events during service, was a central driver of identity threat at the point of leaving. Both findings map closely onto AURIS's own working hypothesis about identity fusion through training.

4.3 Occupational identity and the uniform itself

Research on occupational identity in uniformed and clinical professions, including occupational therapy and post-merger organisational studies, finds that the uniform functions as an identity marker in its own right, reinforcing occupational identity as the dominant identity over organisational or job identity. This supports treating trained-into-role, uniformed or quasi-uniformed, public-facing service delivery as a coherent category.

One related body of work, identity fusion theory (Swann et al.), describes a similar oneness with role or group mechanism, but it was developed to explain extreme pro-group behaviour, including violent extremism. It is theoretically adjacent. It is not used as a public citation for AURIS's framework, given that origin.

This literature base is external corroboration for the direction of the reframing. It does not itself prove that AURIS's own sequence holds across these populations. That remains a matter for the ongoing 108-interview programme.

4A. Disconfirming Cases and Contradiction Register

Good evidence practice means naming disconfirming cases directly rather than only asserting that they exist. AURIS-RES-SUM-076-v1.0 documents three patterns in the current interview set that qualify, without yet changing, the Identity to Community to Purpose to Stability sequence and the reframing set out in this paper. They are recorded here in full, not summarised, because a public reference to the sequence should be able to point to what qualifies it.

- A low-fusion starting condition. Some interviewees' sense of self was never strongly fused with their trained role, so the disruption the sequence assumes may not apply to them.
- Pre-emptive protection. Some interviewees carried out identity work before leaving or changing role and reported little or no disruption, suggesting this may prevent disruption rather than simply speed recovery from it. This is based on a small number of cases and is not yet established.
- Stability through role-replication. Some interviewees appear to reach stability by replicating the old role in a new setting rather than by moving through the fuller Community to Purpose arc. It is not yet known whether this is a genuinely different, valid pathway or a less durable version of the same one.

These three patterns are the contradiction register that travels with any public reference to the identity sequence, alongside the interview denominator itself. They are treated as part of the evidence base, not as noise to be excluded, and they are tracked for further investigation as interview coding continues toward 108.

5. The Research Questions, Reframed

The four research questions and the RQ-000 framing question are not being replaced. Their substance is unchanged. Only the interpretive lens is sharpened, from transition toward service provider identity adaptation. Status labels are carried over unchanged from the Partnership Overview and are not upgraded by this paper.

Framing question, RQ-000

Where, if anywhere, does identity-focused coaching have a clearly defined place within the wider continuum of support for people adapting to identity change following a trained service role, and for whom, when, and under what circumstances? Status: hypothesis only, newly formed from a single practitioner conversation with The Ambulance Staff Charity on 21 July 2026.

RQ-001

Does the Identity to Community to Purpose to Stability sequence hold specifically across trained service-provider populations, military, police, fire, ambulance and clinical NHS roles, not only the military? Status: emerging. 25 of 108 interviews coded, including non-military comparators.

RQ-002

Does pre-emptive identity work, before a service-provider role ends or changes, reduce or prevent identity disruption? Status: hypothesis, based on a single case to date.

RQ-003

Are internally generated regulation strategies more durable than externally anchored ones, for people whose identity has been fused to a trained service role? Status: emerging, weakly supported so far.

RQ-004

Is non-clinical coaching an appropriate and effective delivery model for identity adaptation among trained service providers, compared with therapy? Status: partially supported. Coaching is evidenced as effective for non-clinical, goal-directed populations generally. No study directly comparing coaching against therapy for this specific population has yet been located.

6. The AURIS Framework, Reinterpreted

The five AURIS pillars, Awareness, Understanding, Regulation, Identity and Stability, were originally described as stages of transition. Read through the service provider lens, they are better understood as the stages by which a person trained into a role rebuilds a stable identity once that role ends or changes. This is a reinterpretation of an existing framework, not a new one, and the five pillars themselves are unchanged.

7. What This Does Not Change

- The dataset, the interviews and the methodology are unchanged.
- The programme title remains Identity After the Uniform.
- The interview denominator, 25 of 108, must continue to be disclosed in any public output referencing this framing.
- The three disconfirming cases in Section 4A continue to be acknowledged wherever the sequence is described publicly.
- AURIS continues to deliver identity coaching, not clinical support, and this paper does not alter that positioning.
- No participant names or direct quotations appear in this paper or in any public output drawing on it.

8. Governance Note

This is the first paper in the White Paper series and is explicitly labelled a conceptual position paper rather than an empirical findings paper. It proposes a lens through which existing and future evidence will be interpreted and tested. It does not claim that the interview data has already proven service provider identity adaptation to be the correct frame. Future papers, including the next quarterly Identity After the Uniform paper at 54 interviews, will test this framing against the growing dataset rather than assume it.

Version History

Version	Date	Change Description	Author
v1.0	29 July 2026	First version. Conceptual position paper reframing the research programme's organising lens from military and uniformed transition to trained-into-role service provider identity adaptation, following cross-reference against role identity theory literature and internal RQ documents.	Claude (for Gemma Gardner)
v1.1	29 July 2026	Full audit and rewrite. Prose rewritten throughout in plain sentences, removing the heavy em-dash construction of v1.0. Blindspot check carried out against the Theory of Change, the AURIS Framework document and AURIS-RES-SUM-076-v1.0: v1.0 asserted that	Claude (for Gemma Gardner)

		disconfirming cases and three contradiction-register caveats exist without ever stating them, which is the gap this version closes. Section 4A added, naming the three qualifying patterns explicitly and cross-referencing the source document. No claims, statuses or figures changed as part of this edit.	
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