Summit objective

Identify the priorities, levers, and actions key to a first national strategy for supporting Service children in and through post-16 education.

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FE leaders' perceptions of Service children: an exploratory study

Dr Michael Hall, University of Winchester

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The present project

- To explore the perceptions of key staff in FE providers regarding Service children.

- To identify priorities and key questions to inform larger-scale work with the FE sector.

- Funding for this research was provided by FutureHY, Higher Horizons+, Next Steps South West, Southern Universities Network, Wessex Inspiration Network, Higher Education Outreach Network.
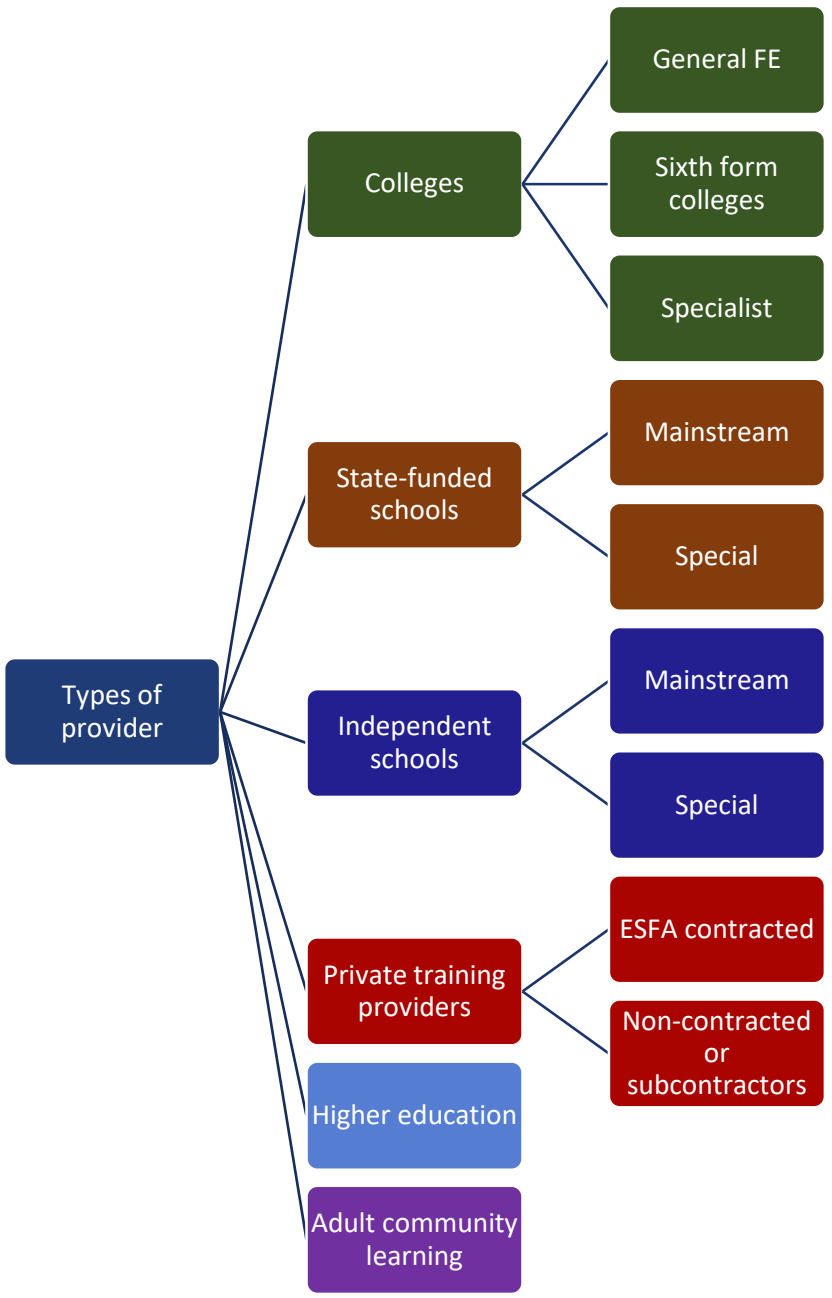
The significance of post-16 experience

- Service children can experience a range of challenges to their progression through education, some of which are distinctive to Service life (McCullouch et *al.*, 2018).

- There has been no systematic attempt to understand the perspectives of leaders in the FE sector.

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Key points

- A complex and diverse sector defies easy classification, hence poses challenges for understanding and supporting Service children's experiences.

- Need to take account of the diverse circumstances of providers (geographical, educational offer etc).

- Providers may not have considered Service children as a distinct group before. Compared with schools and HE there is less regulatory incentive.

- Service children in FE are not children. Provider-student relationship becomes central factor; families less so.

- Disclosure of Service status is a matter for the student, and even then may not be seen as directly relevant to academic experiences.

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The post-16 sector in England

```
Types of provider
├── Colleges
│   ├── General FE
│   ├── Sixth form colleges
│   └── Specialist
├── State-funded schools
│   ├── Mainstream
│   └── Special
├── Independent schools
│   ├── Mainstream
│   └── Special
├── Private training providers
│   ├── ESFA contracted
│   └── Non-contracted or subcontractors
├── Higher education
└── Adult community learning
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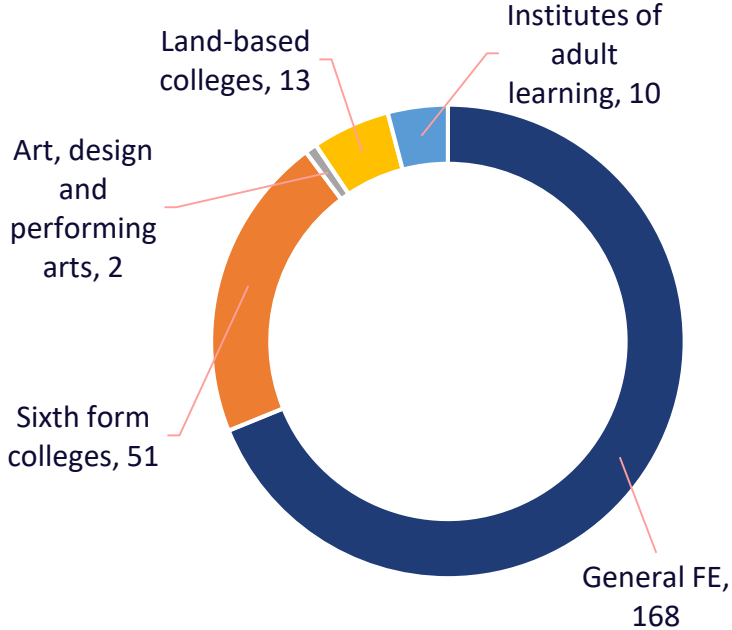
- A complex sector – multiple routes available into post-16 provision.
- Over 18,000 different qualifications available to certificate (2019/20).
- Large number of awarding organisations: top 20 awarded 91% of all certificates in 2019/20.

Type of qualification	Number available to certificate	Number with certificates
GCE A Level	173	147
GCE AS Level	161	131
GCSE	143	143
Vocationally-Related Qualification	8305	5108
Occupational Qualification	5117	3076
Other Life Skills Qualification	1752	1233
Other Vocational Qualification	838	520
Other General Qualification	533	424
Performing Arts Graded Examination	502	386
English For Speakers Of Other Languages	330	221
Functional Skills	226	215
Project	14	12
Advanced Extension Award	1	1
QCF	9	0
Retired Qualifications	5	0
Total	18,109	11,617

The post-16 sector in England

Colleges by type (2019)

- Institutes of adult learning, 10
- Land-based colleges, 13
- Art, design and performing arts, 2
- Sixth form colleges, 51
- General FE, 168

Source: Association of Colleges

College learners by age (2019/20)

- 16-18 apprentices, 69000
- Other apprentices, 195000
- 16-18 general, 669000
- Age 14-15, 13000
- Adult, 14000000

Source: Association of Colleges

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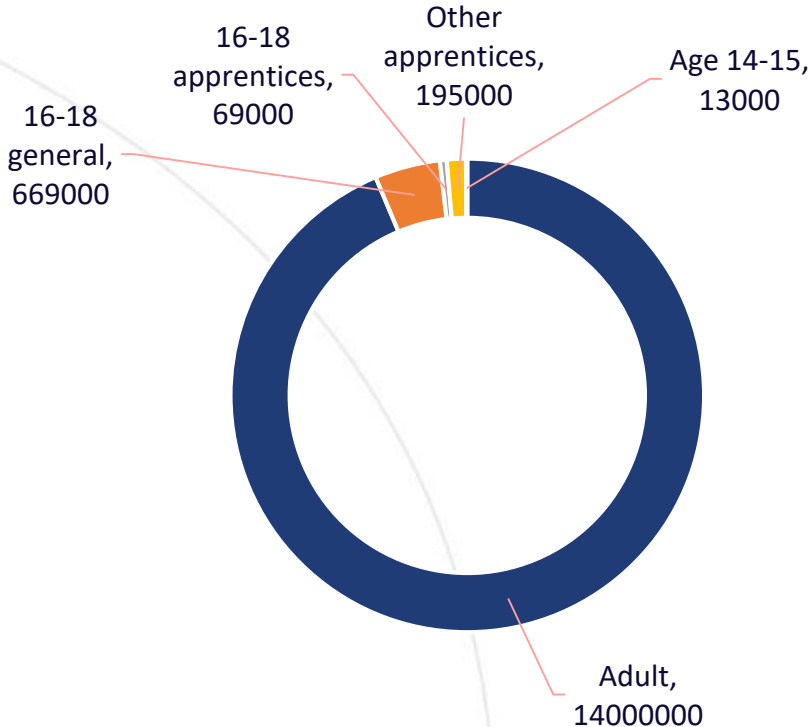
The post-16 sector in England

Total aged 16/17 in education/apprenticeships: **83.8%**
(2019)

Of whom:
A/AS levels: **45.1%**
A/AS also doing Applied General: **7.4%**
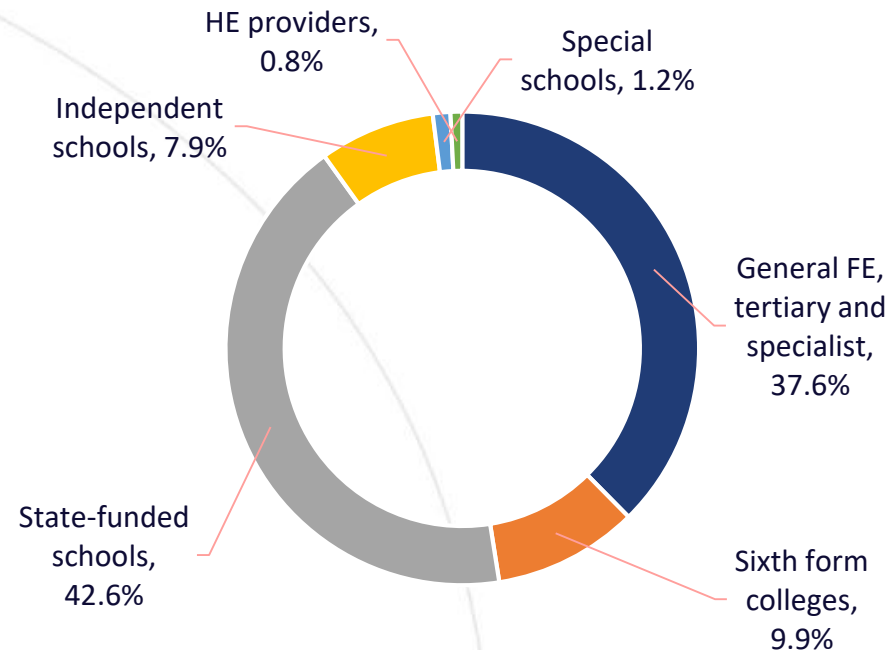Other level 3 qualifications: **19.8%**
Level 2: **13.8%**
Level 1: **2.3%**
Other qualifications: **2.2%**

NEET: **4.3%**

Learners aged 16/17 by provider type (2019)

- HE providers, 0.8%
- Special schools, 1.2%
- Independent schools, 7.9%
- General FE, tertiary and specialist, 37.6%
- State-funded schools, 42.6%
- Sixth form colleges, 9.9%

Source: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/

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Thriving lives for service children | July 2021

What is already known about Service children post-16

- A paucity of data (participation and outcomes) compared with school-age students.

- SPP does not extend to post-16 students (Children's Commissioner, 2018).

- Good GCSE attainment (especially English) is key to good L3 attainment (Thorne, 2018).

- But - Service children who are more mobile are significantly less likely to attain well at GCSE (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

- Military families are more likely to live in more rural areas, with consequences for access to provision (Rodrigues et *al.*, 2020).

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What is already known about Service children post-16

- Young adult carers (aged 16+) can find their educational progression impeded by caring responsibilities (Children's Society, 2017).

- Older Service children become more aware of the significance of their parents' experiences (mental health, deployment risk, finances etc) (McCullouch and Hall, 2016).

- Combination of factors, plus added demands of post-16 study, may contribute to lower attainment post-16 (McCullouch and Hall, 2016).

- Post-16 provision for Service children in Germany and Cyprus has been criticised as limited, with insufficient monitoring (Ofsted, 2011).

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Data collection

- A short questionnaire circulated to principals of general FE colleges and sixth form colleges in localities with large numbers of Service children
  - Cambridgeshire, Devon, Hampshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Wiltshire, North Yorkshire.
  - Total of 40 providers; 9 responses received.
  - Principals were approached, but sometimes delegated responses to other members of staff.

- 3 x semi-structured interviews with respondents.

- Small-scale pilot project in preparation for larger-scale project.

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Sampling strategy

- Aiming to ensure representation of:

- The branches of service (Army, RAF, Royal Navy, Royal Marines)

- Geography (urban/rural, regional)

- Localities with significant populations of Service children

Pilot focused on thirteen local areas, comprising:

- 29,345 Service children (37% of England total)
- Service children in 69% of all schools

Local coverage encompasses major branches of the Services.

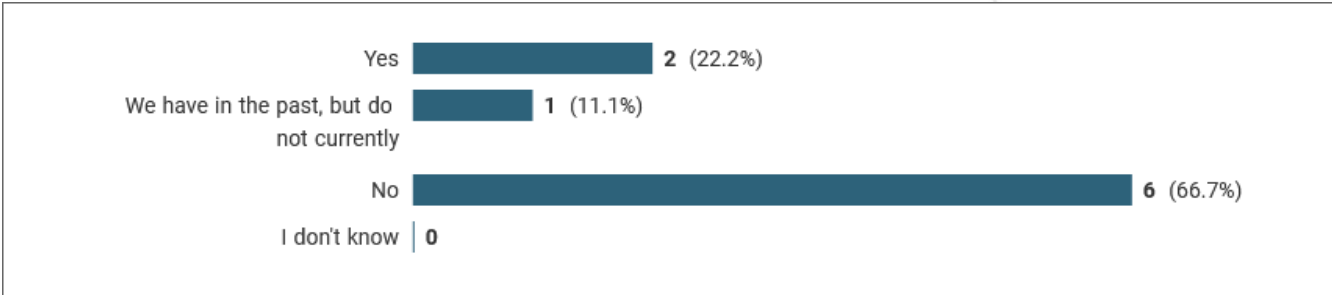Total of 40 general FE colleges and sixth form colleges approached.

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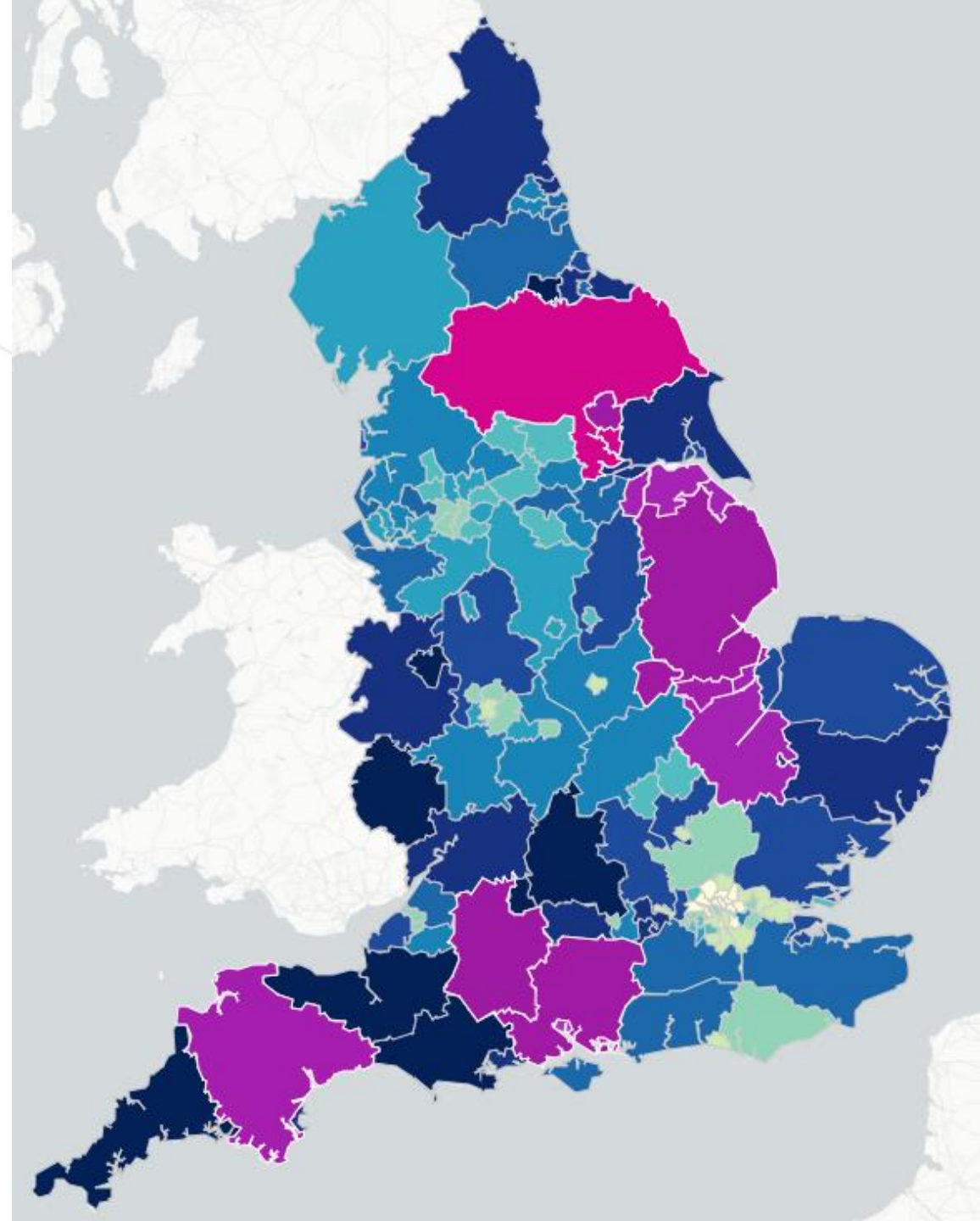
Strength of understanding: self-rated

- Respondents' perceptions of their own strength of understanding of Service children's experiences varied.

Strength	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Respondents	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	2	0	1

- Only two respondents reported that their institutions provided targeted support for Service children.

Yes	**2** (22.2%)
We have in the past, but do not currently	**1** (11.1%)
No	**6** (66.7%)
I don't know	**0**

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Detailed findings

Lack of engagement with Service children's issues at senior/strategic level

- Some providers may not have considered Service children as a distinct group.
- Some will have identified key member(s) of staff as "the Service child person" (e.g. staff with Service backgrounds).
  - Senior leadership may recognise and support such individuals.
- But – some will have well-established processes.
- Compared with schools and HE, no regulatory impetus to engage.

Detailed findings

Diversity of institutional context, situation etc makes a sector-wide approach challenging

- Providers serve a wide range of communities with different social and economic needs and priorities.

- Consolidation or mergers can alter key institutional priorities.
  - Can mean resetting their approach to supporting Service children.

- Some institutions will have long track records and substantial institutional experience of supporting Service communities.

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Detailed findings

Service children in FE are not children

- Focus is on provider-student relationship; families not always engaged with, even at 16-18 phase.

- Responsibility is on student to take ownership of their learning.

- Disclosure of Service status is voluntary – even data collection processes (e.g. on enrolment) will not guarantee disclosure.

- Identification of Service status will not automatically lead to impact on teaching and learning.
  - Separation between pastoral and academic (confidentiality).

Limitations

- Only general FE and sixth form colleges included, hence does not reflect the complexity and diversity of post-16 provision.

- Small sample sizes limits the generalisability of findings – hence these are cast as likely opportunities to inform future exploration.

- Difficult to reflect the diversity of the Service community with such a small-scale project.

- Although principals were approached, many opted to delegate their response to a colleague – hence not necessarily a strategic view.

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