

## Service Children's Progression



# RESEARCH BRIEFING PAPER

## MOVING SCHOOLS AND SERVICE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRESSION

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### IN THIS BRIEFING:

This paper summarises the key issues associated with service children's mobility between schools and the likely impacts on their educational progression.

**Family mobility is unavoidable in the context of effective armed forces. However, there are steps that families, education providers, local authorities, and other agencies can take to lessen the impact of school mobility. These include:**

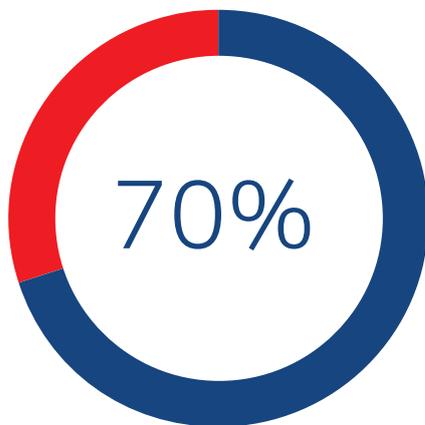
- Post-16 education providers should coordinate their admissions processes and take account of mobility to ensure equitable access to provision;
- Higher education providers should take account of the impact that mobility may have when assessing applications from service family students;
- Schools should ensure that they have robust processes in place for managing transitions into and out of school, including sharing information with students' previous and next schools, and liaising with other schools to ensure continuity of support;
- Education practitioners should engage with the Service Children's Progression Alliance, Service Children in State Schools and other professional networks.



## OVERVIEW

Mobility is a characteristic of life in the armed forces, more so for Army personnel than for other branches (National Audit Office, 2013). The policy direction is towards more stable environments with longer-term postings (Ministry of Defence, 2015), and policy towards service personnel accommodation is changing in part to support those who seek greater stability (Ministry of Defence, 2018). Nevertheless, mobility will continue to be a part of the experience of being a service child; Ofsted (2011) notes that up to 70 per cent of primary-age children in MoD schools move during the school year.

Mobility can impact on a range of factors that relate to service children's educational progression. Key issues (McCullough and Hall, 2016) include: the impact of mobility on attainment; discontinuity of provision; disruptions to friendships and adult relationships; and access to extra-curricular activities.



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## KEY ISSUES

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SERVICE BRANCHES

Patterns of family mobility differ with the branch of the parent's service (National Audit Office, 2013). Army personnel and their families are more likely to be mobile than RAF personnel, and are much more likely to be mobile than Navy personnel. Additionally, Army infantry mobility tends to involve relocation of entire units while RAF and Navy personnel tend to move individually (Department for Education, 2013; Ofsted, 2011). This reflects differences in operational demands and strategic priorities between the branches of service.

Differences in patterns of mobility also speak to the diversity of experience of service children.

It is thus crucial to consider the individual circumstances of children from military families and not to regard them as a homogeneous group

## MOBILITY AND ATTAINMENT

Mobility is popularly held to have a significant impact on student attainment. However, while the link between mobility and attainment may not be conclusively demonstrated, mobile learners can experience repetition in the school curriculum or can find themselves having to rapidly adjust to the demands of different exam boards as they prepare for examinations.

When students move schools, transfer of information can be patchy, with the onus resting on service families to ensure that important information is passed on (Forces in Mind Trust, 2015). Movement between schools is also a risk factor in systematically monitoring students' progression in learning (Ofsted, 2011).

Mobility may therefore act as an indicator of those students at risk of lower-than-expected attainment. Importantly, this is not an indicator of lower ability.

## MOBILITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Students who move during pivotal times for educational decision-making may find themselves at a disadvantage. For example,



students whose families are mobile during Year 11 may find themselves unable to apply to their chosen further education courses or providers owing to being unable to supply a permanent home address (McCullough and Hall, 2016). Mobility may also make it difficult for students to participate in valuable extra-curricular activities, and are likely to find themselves having to “start again” in developing their friendship networks.



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## MOBILITY AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

There is a general lack of evidence regarding the impact of mobility on pastoral wellbeing (McCullouch and Hall, 2016). However, the National College for School Leadership (2011) has noted the importance of addressing the affective learning needs and emotional wellbeing of students as part of managing mobility. Mobility can mean losing valuable peer and adult relationships and being forced to re-make such relationships alongside adjusting to life in a new environment. Schools and education providers should therefore be alert to this possibility when supporting the departure and arrival of mobile students.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Family mobility is a fact of military service, and students should not be placed at a disadvantage by the fact of their family's mobility. Schools and other education providers can take a number of steps to minimise the risk that students are placed at a disadvantage by family mobility:

- **Post-16 education** providers should coordinate their admissions processes and take account of mobility to ensure equitable access to provision;
- **Higher education** providers should take account of the impact that mobility may have when assessing applications from service family students;
- **Schools** should ensure that they have robust processes in place for managing transitions into and out of school, including sharing information with students' previous and next schools, and liaising with other schools to ensure continuity of support;
- **Education practitioners** should engage with the Service Children's Progression Alliance, Service Children in State Schools and forces families' federations in order to share and develop their own practice.

## REFERENCES

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