Service Children's Progression

ALLIANCE

Community Consultation 2022

Exploring the priorities of practitioners working with children and young people from Armed Forces families, and identifying a shared vision to guide the SCiP Alliance's Future Strategy

A report by Tiller Research Ltd on behalf of the SCiP Alliance

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Tiller research

Acknowledgements:

The Alliance is a story of Community and Impact

Our 2018 consultation told us that professionals supporting Armed Forces children and young people in diverse settings throughout the UK needed to be better connected: to each other, to evidence and to support. That need has been our guiding light for the past four years, in which time we have seen the UK-wide Hub Network established and grow to 12 Hubs, co-led by more than 20 partners, and supporting over 600 allies.

"The Alliance is the allies that share the mission and our work to realise it: the Alliance Community"

We have seen more than 15 projects realise new research with practical applications in response to evidenced needs, delivered through the power of partnership. We have seen over 1,000 allies engage in training, conferences and other events, both identifying and addressing sector priorities. This consultation is itself not just a testimony to what has been achieved, but also a symbol of how it was achieved – through listening and action. The Alliance is the allies that share the mission and our work to realise it: the Alliance Community.

I am delighted that, four years on, this consultation has demonstrated that together we can change things for the better, for Service children. Where we have focused our effort, where the Community has cohered around shared goals, we have seen the greatest improvements – for example, in the huge growth in awareness and engagement among higher education partners. And where rigorous research, collaborative development and robust planning prevail, sustainable quality improvement becomes possible – for example, in the development of the *Thriving Lives Toolkit*, rated so highly by schools and others in this research.

I am equally delighted that this report identifies clearly what we must now focus on to consolidate our successes and maximise their long-term impact. The strong track record in research and its translation to practice provides a good foundation to develop further our work informing evidence-based policy. The power of the *Thriving Lives Toolkit* – valued so highly in schools – has the potential to set the standard throughout the learner life-course from early years to higher education and beyond.

"impact is why the community exists, and the community makes that impact possible"

For me, two things stand out as pillars underpinning our progress so far and our future work: the central importance of the Alliance Community and our unflinching focus on impact – realising it, understanding it, demonstrating it, and making it meaningful in the lives of individual Armed Forces children and young people. That impact is why the community exists, and the community makes that impact possible.

Philip Dent
Director- Service Children's Progression Alliance

Executive Summary

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance is a UK-wide partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children and young people from Armed Forces families. It is hosted by the University of Winchester and supported by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The SCiP Alliance commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with stakeholders, to identify both the progress of the Alliance since the previous stakeholder consultation undertaken in 2018, and stakeholder views on the future role of the Alliance.

Key Findings

- Overall, stakeholders feel that the SCiP Alliance has had a **positive impact on professional practice** relating to children and young people from Armed Forces families. The greatest impact has been felt by university respondents to the consultation;

- Overall, practitioners familiar with the Alliance view it as having **a positive impact on the lives of Armed Forces children**. There is considerable opportunity to further enhance this impact by raising awareness of the Alliance, and the resources available;

- The Alliance's development of **evidence-based good practice**, and research to build the evidence base relating to children and young people from Armed Forces families, is highly valued;

- Practitioners value the **opportunities to network** with others made possible by the Alliance;

- Significant progress has been made in relation to the **research and practice elements** of the Alliance's theory of change. This provides a strong foundation from which to **influence policy** in future work.

Impact of the Alliance

The consultation explored stakeholder views on the SCiP Alliance's contribution to the community of practitioners working with children and young people from Armed Forces families:

- There are notable changes in the sector compared with the practitioner consultation undertaken in 2018. Although there may be other factors involved, these changes are all in areas that have been a focus for the SCiP Alliance over the last four years:
  - There has been an **increase in the overall awareness of Armed Forces children among university and college practitioners** though this remains lower than for other practitioner groups. Our sample of this subgroup comprised mainly of university widening participation and outreach practitioners, indicating a notable development in the recognition of young people from Armed Forces families within work focussed on enabling educational progression;
  - There is an increased proportion of both school respondents and university/ college respondents strongly agreeing that they were confident in supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to make **informed choices about their future education and careers**;
  - There has been a notable improvement in practitioners' views on the **availability of resources**. The proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that they have been able to find appropriate resources has increased across all sectors. In addition, the proportion strongly disagreeing with this statement has reduced. The proportion of university/ college respondents strongly disagreeing has more than halved, from 44% in 2018 to 21% in 2022.

- Practitioners familiar with the Alliance view it as having had a **positive impact on the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families**, with 53% of respondents either completely or mostly agreeing that this was the case, and just 6% disagreeing. Agreement among university/ college respondents was particularly high, with 82% either completely or mostly agreeing;

- There is strong agreement among practitioners that the SCiP Alliance has had a **positive impact both on individual practice and on the community of professionals** working with children and young people from Armed Forces families. Overall, 55% of respondents either completely or mostly agreed that the Alliance has had a positive impact on the community, rising to 87% of university/ college respondents;

- **SCiP Alliance resources, groups and events, research outputs, and policy activities were all viewed as useful by those who had engaged with them**. The *Thriving Lives Toolkit* had been used by 49% of respondents, of whom 84% rated it as extremely or very useful;

- Stakeholders identified the significant contributions of the SCiP Alliance as:
  - **Building an evidence base**;
  - Developing evidence-based **tools and resources**;
  - **Bringing people within the sector together,** developing a shared sense of purpose and creating fertile conditions for action;
  - **Raising awareness of Armed Forces children,** in particular among university respondents.

State of the Sector

The consultation sought to understand the assets, priorities and opportunities within the community of practitioners providing support for children and young people from Armed Forces families:

- Three distinct levels of challenge were identified by practitioners:
  - **Fundamental impacts of life in the Armed Forces**, such as the impacts of mobility and deployment;
  - **Strategic challenges**, such as the interaction of devolved and reserved policy, limited data, capacity and resource constraints, dominant narratives that can mask the needs of this cohort, and (in England) the variability of school governance accountability;
  - **Practical challenges**, such as engaging with other stakeholders, engaging parents, and securing the buy-in of organisational decision-makers.

Family respondents were asked their views on the benefits and challenges of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces family, and what would make a positive difference:

- Four key themes were identified in relation to the **benefits of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces family**: resilience; access to experiences; being part of a community; and financial security. One in 20 (6%) said there were no perceived benefits;

- Four key themes were identified in relation to the **challenges of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces family**: mobility; impact of separation; lack of stability; and a risk of negative impact on mental health, which may be masked by coping strategies;

What Would Help?

- When asked what would most help them to enable children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive, practitioners identified:
  - **Resources** including research evidence, best-practice guidance, toolkits and data sets;
  - **Communication** including effective collaboration with local and national networks, and stronger links with the Armed Forces community;
  - **Policy responses** to the fundamental impacts of life in the Armed Forces, such as consistent and structured support to ensure continuity of education when relocating due to mobility.

- Family respondents identified three key areas in relation to **what would make a positive difference**: school level responses; policy level responses; and provision of specific services or resources.

The Future Role of the Alliance

Stakeholders were asked for their views on the future role of the SCiP Alliance:

- Stakeholders view the **network of practitioners** as a major asset of the SCiP Alliance. This enables connections to be made, knowledge and expertise to be shared, and partnerships to be built;

- Stakeholders place high value on the **evidence base** that the SCiP Alliance has helped to build and disseminate. Practitioners feel confident in using or promoting the **evidence-based resources and practice** developed or recommended by the Alliance;

- Stakeholders view the most desirable future **priorities** for the SCiP Alliance to be:

  o **Consolidating and embedding** success to date;

  o Bringing people together, supporting **networking and collaboration**;

  o Identifying areas for potential **policy influence**, using the evidence base;

  o Developing an evaluation framework to assess and evidence the **impact** of the Alliance.

Consultation Process

- The consultation was undertaken in three phases. An online questionnaire received 173 responses. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 17 stakeholders representing a cross-section of the community of practitioners. Finally, a stakeholder workshop was held to explore preliminary findings. Participants representing the variety of perspectives in the SCiP Alliance community discussed the emerging themes, providing additional depth and breadth of insight to ensure robust conclusions, and explored implications for the forthcoming SCiP Alliance strategy 2022-25;

- Questionnaire responses represented a good mix of stakeholder perspectives. Responses were received from all UK regions, including 19% from devolved nations. A quarter of the responses received were from Armed Forces families (25%). Three quarters were from practitioners, analysed in three groups: schools (26%), university and colleges (17%), other sector stakeholders (32%). The university/ college grouping was used to allow comparisons with the 2018 consultation, although it is noted that the majority of respondents were from HE widening participation and outreach practitioners, with limited responses from FE colleges or HE student services;

- Descriptive statistics were produced for the quantitative questionnaire responses. Qualitative data from free-text questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed to identify key themes. These were further developed following the member-check process undertaken at the workshop.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the future of the SCiP Alliance:

- We recommend focussing primarily on **consolidating the success of the SCiP Alliance to date**, ahead of identifying new initiatives. For example, extending and embedding use of the *Thriving Lives Toolkit*, building the Hub network, and reviewing communications to extend the reach of the Alliance;

- We recommend **developing a strategy for policy influence**. The greatest potential for sustained positive impact at scale is through influencing policy at local or national level. The SCiP Alliance has made significant progress with developing the evidence base and enhancing practice. This provides a good foundation for credible, evidence-based policy development;

- We recommend **reviewing geographical engagement with the Alliance**, proactively reviewing the pattern of engagement, and considering how different approaches, e.g. in devolved nations, may increase reach and impact;

- We recommend **developing an impact evaluation framework**. Developing processes to understand and evidence the impact of the SCiP Alliance, and inform future priorities.

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Section 1 – Introduction

1.1   Context

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance is a UK-wide partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children and young people from Armed Forces families. It is hosted by the University of Winchester and supported by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

> *We bring together practitioners, researchers, policymakers and funders to build a stronger evidence-base, better policy, and enhanced support for Service children's education and progression, placing their voices at the heart of all we do.*[1]

The SCiP Alliance commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with stakeholders. The research objectives were to identify:

- The needs of UK Armed Forces children and their supporters' needs and priorities in helping them to thrive;
- The Alliance's contribution to the community since the previous stakeholder consultation (2018);
- Stakeholder views on the priorities for and role of the Alliance, to inform the development of the Alliance's 2022-25 strategy.

This report outlines the key findings from the consultation relating to each of the research objectives. The report concludes by highlighting recommendations to inform the development of the renewed SCiP Alliance strategy, reflecting the views of stakeholders on the value of the Alliance and how it can be most effective in having a positive impact on the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families.

1.2   Data Collection

Three methods of data collection were used for this consultation:

- **Online questionnaire:** a core questionnaire comprised of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. Different stakeholder groups were asked additional questions specific to their professional setting.

  The questionnaire was split into two sections. The first repeated questions from 2018 in order to look at changes over time in addition to understanding the current views of the community. The second section sought specific feedback on the activities and contributions of the SCiP Alliance.

  An Armed Forces family member questionnaire was also made available. Although direct work with families is outside the scope of the Alliance's mission, it was recognised following feedback from the 2018 consultation that families' experiences and perspectives are important in informing the priorities the Alliance should seek to address in order to deliver its vision of thriving lives for Service children.

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[1] SCiP Alliance mission: https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page

The questionnaire was promoted by the SCiP Alliance staff team and partner organisations through professional networks. A Welsh language version was promoted in Wales alongside the English language version. A total of 173 usable responses were received over a three week period in June 2022. This compares with 172 responses received in 2018;

- **Semi-structured interviews:** a total of 17 stakeholders, representing a cross-section of the community, took part in either a one-to-one or small group telephone or video interview. A semi-structured topic guide was used to explore key themes in more depth, with discussions lasting for an average of 28 minutes (range 17-49 minutes). Interviews were recorded with permission, and transcribed in an intelligent verbatim format prior to analysis;

- **Stakeholder workshop:** initial findings from the questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews were presented at a SCiP Alliance Strategy Development Day held in Birmingham (7th July 2022). This was followed by a series of facilitated small group discussions involving a total of 25 participants representing the variety of perspectives in the SCiP Alliance community, including education providers, serving and ex-Armed Forces personnel, families, local authorities, youth work, local and national policy, research and charities. This provided a check-and-challenge review of the initial findings, with participants providing additional depth and breadth of insight to ensure robust conclusions. The reflections of stakeholders were also used to explore how the SCiP Alliance strategy should respond to the themes identified from the consultation responses.

1.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were produced for the quantitative questionnaire responses. Where relevant, responses were split into three subsets to allow comparison between key groups:

- **Schools:** Primary School or Academy; Secondary School or Academy; All through School or Academy; Special School;

- **University/ College:** Further Education College; University- Widening Participation or Outreach; University- Student Services[2];

- **Other Sector Stakeholders:** MOD; Charity or Third Sector Organisation; Local Authority; UK or Devolved Government; Research Institution; Other.

Qualitative data from free-text questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed to identify key themes. These themes were not pre-determined, but were developed during our analysis of the data set. Initial themes were presented at the stakeholder workshop as part of a check-and-challenge process. The workshop outputs were used as an additional data set to develop and confirm the final set of themes.

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[2] University and college respondents were grouped together in the 2018 consultation analysis. There is evidence from recent research (e.g. Hall, 2021) that HE and FE should be considered as separate groups in order to fully understand the distinct nature of each environment, a view shared by some participants in this consultation. However, the views expressed by FE respondents in this consultation were not notably distinct from those of HE respondents. Therefore, we have retained the combined grouping used in 2018 for the current analysis in order to compare responses over time. We note this may not be representative of the college/ FE sector overall as our sample is small and self-selected.

1.4 Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The analysed sample of 173 responses represented a good mix of stakeholder perspectives. Responses were received from all UK regions, including 19% from the devolved nations. The sample provided a good balance of sector representation and professional roles:

- **Sector representation:**
    - Family respondents (25%);
    - School stakeholders (26%):
    - University/ college (17%);
    - Other sector stakeholders (32%);

- **Practitioner role:**[3]
    - Regular direct work with young people (43%);
    - One-off/ periodic direct work with young people (15%);
    - Management or Strategy (39%);
    - Research or Policy (12%).

1.5 Profile of Workshop Attendees

The 25 stakeholders who attended the strategy workshop represented the following perspectives:

- **Schools** (8%);

- **University/ College:**
    - Further Education College (4%);
    - University- Student Support or Student Union (12%);
    - University- Widening Participation or Outreach (24%);

- **Other Sector Stakeholders:**
    - Charity or Third Sector Organisation (16%);
    - Local Authority (16%);
    - MOD (16%);
    - Research Institution (4%).

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[3] Some respondents selected multiple roles, so the total exceeds 100%

Section 2 – State of the Sector

The consultation sought to understand the assets, priorities and opportunities within the community of practitioners working with children and young people from Armed Forces families.

The consultation exercise undertaken in 2018 asked practitioners about their confidence in understanding the needs of and opportunities for this cohort, and their views on the availability of resources to support their practice. These questions were asked again to explore what might have changed since the previous consultation took place. In addition, practitioners were asked about the challenges and opportunities they experience, and what would most help them to enable children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive.

Key messages in this section:

- **Armed Forces families identify significant opportunities and challenges as a result of their status as an Armed Forces family.** Views on what would make a positive difference can be grouped into three key areas: school level responses, policy level responses, and provision of specific services or resources;

- **Compared with the practitioner consultation undertaken in 2018:**
  - There has been an increase in the overall awareness of Armed Forces children among university and college practitioners, though this remains lower than for other practitioner groups;
  - There is an increased proportion of both school respondents and university/ college respondents strongly agreeing that they were confident in supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to make informed choices about their future education and careers;
  - There has been a notable improvement in the views of practitioners regarding the availability of resources.

- **When asked what would most help them to enable children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive, practitioners identified:**
  - **Resources** including research evidence, best-practice guidance, toolkits and data sets;
  - **Communication** including effective collaboration with local and national networks, and stronger links with the Armed Forces community;
  - **Policy responses** to the fundamental impacts of life in the Armed Forces, such as consistent and structured support to ensure continuity of education when relocating due to mobility.

2.1   Family Responses

The views of families are an important element in understanding what thriving lives for Armed Forces children looks like. The online questionnaire included an option for families to share their perspectives. Though we did not actively recruit families as participants, family respondents to this questionnaire may be members of the SCiP Alliance, or have been sent a copy by an Alliance member.

Responses received

A total of 44 family responses were received:

- A non-serving parent or carer   66%
- A current serving member of the UK Armed Forces   16%
- A veteran of the regular or reserve UK Armed Forces   11%
- A young person from an Armed Forces family   7%

There was a broadly representative split of responses from across Service branches. Just 7% of family respondents had knowingly been involved with any work of the SCiP Alliance.

Benefits

Family respondents were asked their views on the benefits of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces family. Four key themes were identified:

- **Resilience** and inter-personal skills;
- Access to **experiences** and travel;
- Being part of a **community**;
- **Financial security** and access to resources;

A small proportion (6%) said that there were no perceived benefits.

Challenges

Family respondents were asked their view on the challenges of being a child or young person from an Armed Forces family. Four key themes were identified:

- **Mobility** affecting education, disrupting support networks, friendship groups, particular challenges for those with additional needs;
- Deployment creating family stress, **impact of separation**;
- Fewer educational options and **less stability** than some non-Armed Forces families;
- Risk of **negative impact on mental health**, sometimes masked by coping strategies.

What would make a positive difference?

Family respondents were asked their view on what would make the most positive difference to the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families. Responses were grouped into three broad areas:

- **School level responses:**
  - A view that many schools don't recognise, understand or respond to the specific needs of Armed Forces children, and that addressing this would be extremely beneficial;
  - Some respondents mentioned the need for greater accountability for the use of Service Pupil Premium in England, though this was typically in the context of a more general feeling of schools not responding positively to the specific challenges experienced by Armed Forces families;

- **Policy level responses:**
  - o A view that local and national government policy should place greater focus on resolving known challenges for Armed Forces children, most commonly in relation to school transfers and allocations related to mobility;
  - o Some examples were given of good practice by Local Authorities where visible coordination of local resources is used to support schools by raising awareness of issues and providing resources to positively support families;
- **Specific services or resources:** several examples were given where access to specific support would be seen as making a positive difference. The two most frequently mentioned examples were:
  - o Improved access to welfare and mental health support, for both children and parents;
  - o Access to childcare support to enable the non-serving parent to work.

Summary

The responses received from families are consistent with the findings of previous research undertaken with Armed Forces families, such as that collated by the *Living in our Shoes* report commissioned by the MOD (2020)[4]. This indicates a relatively stable set of significant opportunities and challenges where positive impact might be achieved.

2.2   Practitioner Views

Questionnaire respondents were asked their views, confidence and experience of access to resources using a similar question set to the SCiP Alliance stakeholder consultation undertaken in 2018. This section compares the responses received to those from 2018.

In all cases, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement. Seven response options were presented: *Completely Agree*, *Mostly Agree*, *Slightly Agree*, *Slightly Disagree*, *Mostly Disagree*, *Completely Disagree*, and *N/A*.

To aid clarity, the charts in this section combine *Completely Agree* and *Mostly Agree* to form *Strongly Agree*; and combine *Mostly Disagree* and *Completely Disagree* to form *Strongly Disagree*. Percentages are calculated from respondents providing an active response to each statement, with those answering *N/A* removed.

2.2.1   Distinctiveness of the experience of Armed Forces children

The majority of respondents to the 2018 consultation strongly agreed that the experience of being part of an Armed Forces family can impact education in a way that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups (fig 1). Responses to the current consultation show a similar pattern. Some observations:

- Levels of strong disagreement to this statement were low previously, but are entirely absent in the current data set;
- The proportion of university/ college respondents giving an active response who strongly agree with the statement has fallen. However, a third of this respondent group selected *N/A* in 2018 (33%), with 56% of this group either

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[4]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895236/Living_in_our_shoes_Full_Report__1__embargoed_30_June.pdf

'completely' or 'mostly' agreeing. In 2022, just 3% of respondents in this group selected *N/A*. This suggests that the most notable change has been greater awareness of and engagement with the experiences of Armed Forces children among respondents from universities and colleges.

The previous consultation suggested that there was a need for raising awareness about the experiences of Armed Forces children, especially among university and college stakeholders. **These results suggest that there has been an increase in the overall awareness of Armed Forces children among university and college practitioners, though this remains lower than for other practitioner groups.** This shows notable progress in an area where the Alliance has placed considerable effort, though it should be noted that our self-selected sample of respondents for the current consultation is comprised mainly of university widening participation and outreach practitioners (72%). Although FE college respondents gave similar views, the small number choosing to participate may not be representative of the sector.

The experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups (n=121)
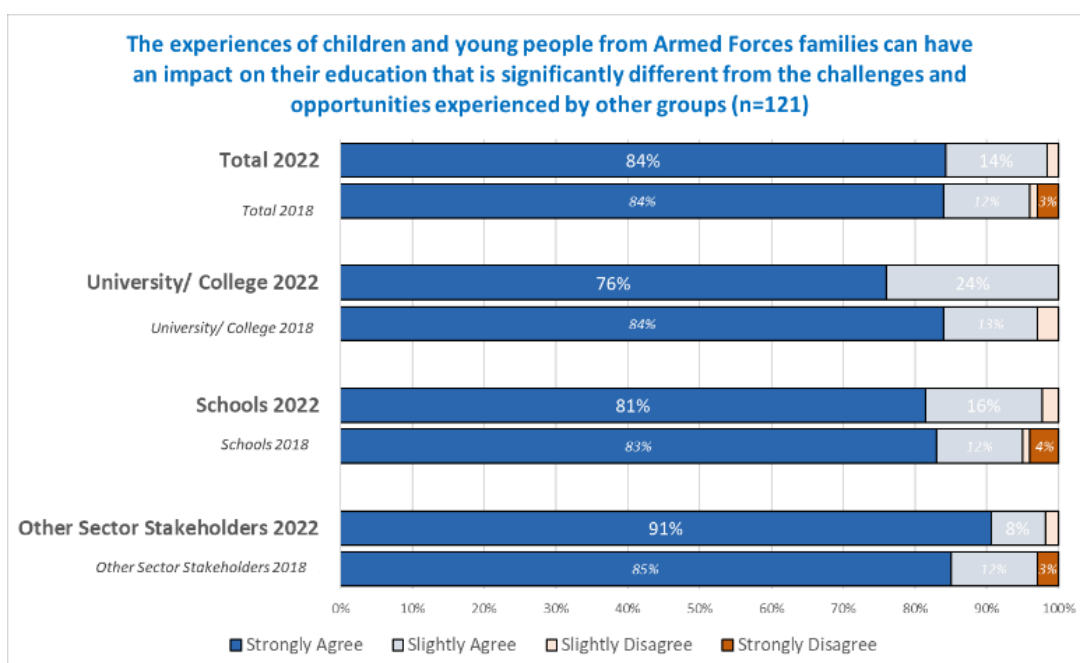
Fig 1: Stakeholder views on the extent to which the challenges and opportunities experienced by Armed Forces children are significantly different from those experienced by other groups of children and young people.

2.2.2 Practitioner confidence

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their confidence in four areas related to understanding the needs of children and young people from Armed Forces families. As in 2018, overall confidence in understanding the challenges experienced by this cohort was high, though confidence in understanding the advantages reported by many of this cohort was lower (fig 2). **Confidence among university and college respondents had notably improved**, with increased proportions strongly agreeing with both statements. There was also a reduction across all stakeholder groups in the proportion strongly disagreeing.

A new question explored practitioner confidence in enabling children and young people from Armed Forces families to **thrive**. Figure 3 shows that confidence was again high, with 75% of respondents strongly agreeing with this statement, though confidence was notably lower among university and college respondents.

In contrast, confidence in supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to make **informed choices** about their future education and careers was similar across all stakeholder groups (fig 4). Overall confidence remained somewhat lower than for other questions, but two-thirds of respondents (67%) still strongly agreed with this statement. Confidence in this area appears to have increased somewhat among education professionals, with an increased proportion of both school respondents and university/ college respondents strongly agreeing that they were confident in supporting this cohort to make informed choices about their future education and careers, compared with 2018.

I am confident that I understand the challenges experienced by many children and young people from Armed Forces families (n=122)

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total 2022	83%	14%		
Total 2018	81%	11%	4%	4%
University/ College 2022	69%	27%		4%
University/ College 2018	52%	29%	10%	10%
Schools 2022	84%	12%		
Schools 2018	85%	8%	4%	
Other Sector Stakeholders 2022	89%	9%		
Other Sector Stakeholders 2018	93%	5%		

I am confident that I understand the advantages that many children and young people from Armed Forces families identify as a result of their experience (n=121)

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total 2022	70%	26%		
Total 2018	68%	20%	8%	4%
University/ College 2022	58%	38%		4%
University/ College 2018	47%	30%	13%	10%
Schools 2022	73%	21%	5%	
Schools 2018	69%	19%	7%	5%
Other Sector Stakeholders 2022	73%	25%		
Other Sector Stakeholders 2018	81%	14%	5%	

Fig 2: Stakeholder confidence in understanding the challenges and advantages experienced by children and young people from Armed Forces families.

I am confident about supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive (n=122)

- Total 2022: Strongly Agree 75%, Slightly Agree 19%, Slightly Disagree 5%
- Total 2018:
- University/ College 2022: Strongly Agree 46%, Slightly Agree 38%, Slightly Disagree 12%, Strongly Disagree 4%
- University/ College 2018:
- Schools 2022: Strongly Agree 79%, Slightly Agree 14%, Slightly Disagree 5%
- Schools 2018:
- Other Sector Stakeholders 2022: Strongly Agree 85%, Slightly Agree 13%
- Other Sector Stakeholders 2018:

Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ◻ Slightly Agree ◻ Slightly Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■

Fig 3: Stakeholder confidence in supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive.

I am confident about supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to make informed choices about their future education and careers (n=113)

- Total 2022: Strongly Agree 67%, Slightly Agree 26%, Slightly Disagree 4%
- Total 2018: Strongly Agree 62%, Slightly Agree 27%, Slightly Disagree 5%, Strongly Disagree 6%
- University/ College 2022: Strongly Agree 69%, Slightly Agree 27%, Strongly Disagree 4%
- University/ College 2018: Strongly Agree 56%, Slightly Agree 33%, Slightly Disagree 5%, Strongly Disagree 7%
- Schools 2022: Strongly Agree 65%, Slightly Agree 28%, Slightly Disagree 5%
- Schools 2018: Strongly Agree 57%, Slightly Agree 29%, Slightly Disagree 9%, Strongly Disagree 5%
- Other Sector Stakeholders 2022: Strongly Agree 68%, Slightly Agree 23%, Slightly Disagree 6%
- Other Sector Stakeholders 2018: Strongly Agree 72%, Slightly Agree 17%, Slightly Disagree 8%

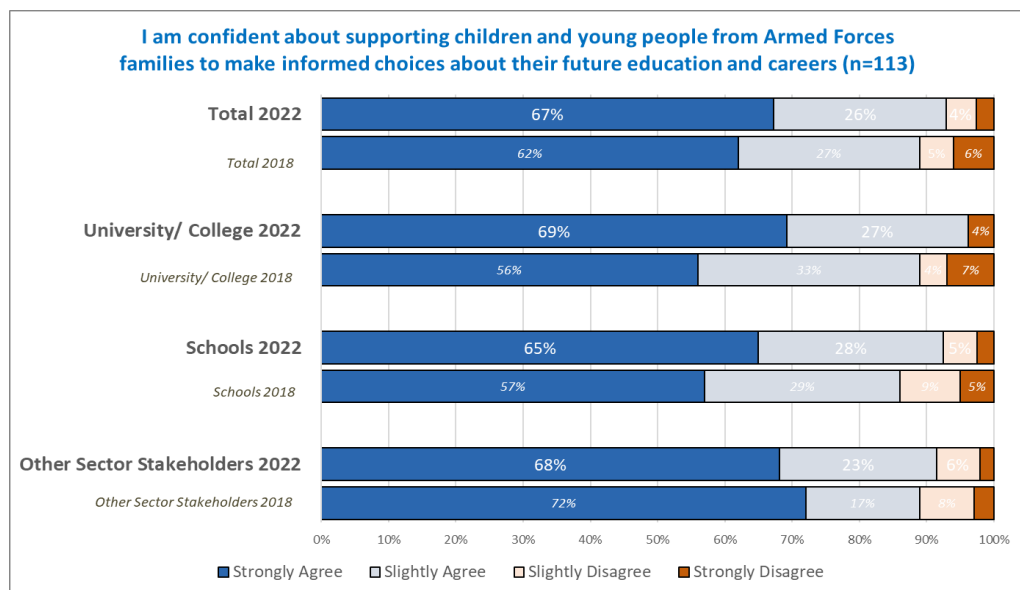Legend: ■ Strongly Agree ◻ Slightly Agree ◻ Slightly Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

Fig 4: Stakeholder confidence in supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families to make informed choices about their future education and careers.

2.2.3 Access to resources

There has been a notable improvement in practitioner's views on the availability of resources. The proportion of respondents strongly agreeing that they have been able to find appropriate resources has increased across all sectors, although remains low at 35% overall (fig 5). In addition, the proportion strongly disagreeing with this statement has reduced. The proportion of university/ college respondents strongly disagreeing has more than halved, from 44% in 2018 to 21% in 2022.

Whenever I have looked for resources to support children and young people from Armed Forces families, it has been easy to find what I need (n=116)

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Total 2022	35%	38%	11%	16%
Total 2018	27%	33%	17%	23%
University/ College 2022	17%	39%	21%	21%
University/ College 2018	12%	20%	24%	44%
Schools 2022	40%	40%	5%	16%
Schools 2018	29%	34%	17%	20%
Other Sector Stakeholders 2022	40%	36%	12%	12%
Other Sector Stakeholders 2018	32%	39%	12%	17%
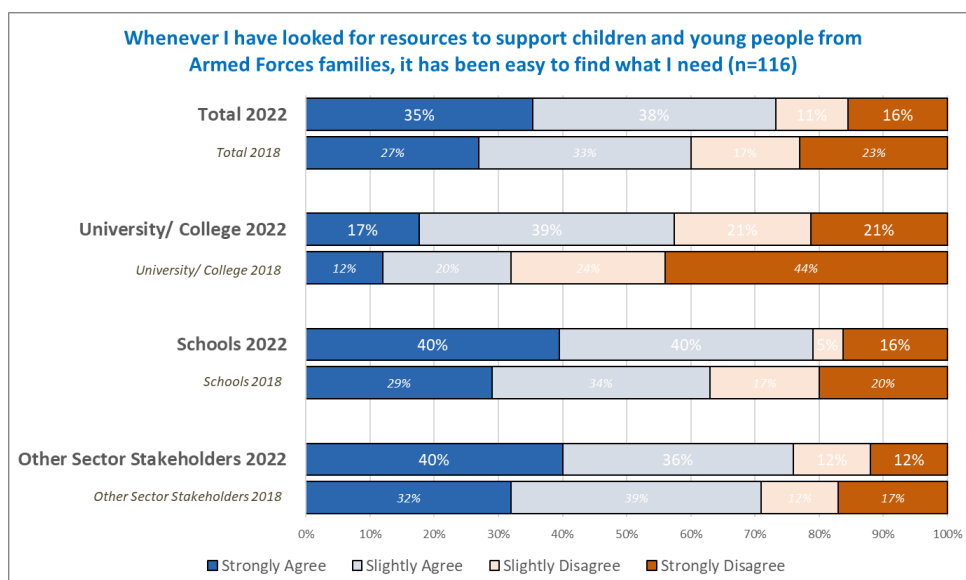
Fig 5: Stakeholder views on the availability of suitable resources to support Armed Forces children.

2.3 Work Across the Sector

Questionnaire respondents were asked about any specific provision for Armed Forces children within their school, institution or organisation.

2.3.1 Schools

Overall, 70% of school respondents said their school offers specific support or programmes for children from Armed Forces families, with similar responses from primary and secondary phases.

Around two-thirds of local-authority maintained school respondents said that their school offered **specific support** to this cohort (69%), compared to 56% of those from state-funded academies. Just five respondents were from a fee-paying independent school, but all said that specific support or programmes were offered.

The two most commonly mentioned types of support were a **specific club**, typically held weekly; and **targeted access to pastoral support**.

2.3.2 Universities and colleges

Just over half of respondents from universities and colleges said that their institution offered specific support or programmes for children or young people from Armed Forces families as part of their **widening participation or student recruitment** programmes (52%), with a further 43% including this cohort within general programmes. Targeted support typically involved one or more of: holding a Creative Forces Day; fully funded trips to an HEI; and visits to specific cohorts in schools.

Just under a third of respondent institutions offer specific **support for current students** from Armed Forces families (29%). This typically involves a named contact to offer tailored guidance and welfare support. In many cases, this is a new development, in response to the new UCAS tick-box identifying this cohort.

Just over half of university and college respondents (54%) said their institution had signed the **Armed Forces Covenant** with specific references to the children of Armed Forces personnel and veterans (*Don't Know- 46%*).

Some 60% of respondents from universities and colleges in England with a **Higher Education Access and Participation Plan** with the Office for Students said their institution's plan contains a specific Service child commitment (*No- 16%, Don't Know- 24%*).

2.3.3 Other sector stakeholders

Responses were received from a diverse range of sector stakeholders, typically with a specific interest in providing support to Armed Forces families. This demonstrates the richness of expertise and resources within the sector. Three broad types of support were identified:

- **Policy and advocacy**- providing support to schools and other organisations and/ or representation for Armed Forces families in order to strengthen practice and improve outcomes for families;

- **Resources and programmes**- materials and/or structured engagement opportunities for Armed Forces families, typically offered at national or regional level;

- **Support and advice**- staff or other resource to provide tailored support to individuals or groups of families/ young people, typically offered at a local or sub-regional level.

2.4 Challenges Within the Sector

Stakeholders identified a range of challenges in relation to their work supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families. These mostly provided confirmation of core themes identified in the 2018 consultation. Three distinct levels of challenge were identified by practitioners.

2.4.1 Fundamental impacts of life in the Armed Forces

These are factors that are experienced by a high proportion of Armed Forces children as a result of being from an Armed Forces family. Although they will not be experienced by every Armed Forces child, and will have different impacts, both positive and negative, for each individual depending on a range of factors, they are central to understanding the needs of and opportunities for this cohort.

Examples of these fundamental impacts include:

- **Mobility**- Armed Forces families relocating, resulting in, for example: loss of continuity in education and social support; severe disruption to support for children and young people with additional needs; challenges for schools due to gaps in knowledge or changes in curriculum. Some schools face significant challenges where roll numbers fluctuate significantly, affecting funding levels and consequently the ability to retain skilled staff, and respond positively to changing needs and opportunities;

- **Deployment**- the effects of separation on children and young people when a parent is away on active duty, and changes to family dynamics both when a serving parent leaves and when they return;

- **Mental health and wellbeing**- Armed Forces families are not unique in experiencing periods of family stress, or the impacts of separation and/or relocation. Nevertheless, their experiences are likely to have more in common with those of other Armed Forces families than with civilian families.

These are factors that are likely to be permanent features, so opportunities to reduce their presence may be limited. However, their fundamental nature means that investment in longer-term projects to identify ways of mitigating negative impacts and making the most of positive impacts is worthwhile.

2.4.2 Strategic challenges
These are factors that influence the conditions behind common challenges reported by practitioners, but for which there is a reasonable prospect of change, for example through policy development or innovation in practice. Examples include:

- **Interaction of devolved and reserved policy**- education is a devolved matter for the home nations, and defence a reserved matter for the UK government. This creates a range of challenges, including where families move between education systems, and for ensuring that national work integrates fully and effectively with all settings in an equitable manner;

- **Variability of school governance accountability**- an additional challenge in England is presented by school accountability structures, which involve a mix of local authorities and multi-academy trusts. This increases the complexity of co-ordinating local work;

- **Lack of data**- many respondents noted that there is limited data relating to Armed Forces children. In some cases, this is a practical barrier for identifying the cohort; and strategically it is a barrier for building a case for action. Availability of data is reported as being both limited and inconsistent, e.g. with available evidence often limited to a region or nation;

- **Capacity and resource constraints**- a lack of time and/ or dedicated resources were often identified as barriers for practitioners being able to deliver effective support;

- **Dominant narratives**- several respondents noted that Armed Forces children are often a hidden cohort who are not recognised as having specific needs. Some school respondents noted that Armed Forces children often don't fit the profile of those requiring additional support or intervention, and so their needs are often masked. For example, Armed Forces children may appear outwardly self-confident in a new environment. Masking can be exacerbated by over-extension of some of the advantages experienced by some Armed Forces children, such as resilience, which can be a barrier for engaging decision makers in recognising individual needs.

2.4.3 Practical challenges

These are factors that are routinely experienced at the local level. There are common challenges, the effects of which can be very different depending on local practice. Examples include:

- **Engaging other stakeholders**- although many respondents reported strong local networks, others reported challenges engaging with local schools, colleges or universities, or other support organisations;
- **Engaging parents**- several schools, and other stakeholders, reported challenges engaging parents. There is a reluctance by some to identify as an Armed Forces family, in particular in places with small numbers of Armed Forces families. Others reported particular difficulties engaging with Commonwealth families;
- **Senior buy-in**- several practitioners reported challenges in securing buy-in from decision makers in order to prioritise work supporting Armed Forces children. In part this is due to the dominant narratives mentioned in the previous section.

2.5 What Would Help?

Respondents were asked what would most help them to enable children and young people from Armed Forces families to thrive. The following themes were identified:

- **Research evidence and best practice guidance:** several respondents emphasised the value of research, and using this to support practitioners to identify the best ways to support children and families. An appropriate balance of rigour and accessibility was highlighted. Some respondents focussed on the quality of the evidence on which guidance is based, with others highlighting the need for easily digestible information to increase its practical value and usability, and ultimately its impact. This highlights the **importance of tailored dissemination for different audiences**;
- **Collaboration:** a view that opportunities to engage in a network to share knowledge and hear different experiences is valuable. Local networks were highlighted as being of particular value for frontline practitioners, with others deriving most value from regional or national networks. **Effective communication between different layers of networks** was viewed as important, so that local and regional experience informs national policy, and national or regional initiatives are applicable to local circumstances;
- **Stronger links with the Armed Forces community:** the importance of hearing the voice of children and families was highlighted by several respondents, with some schools in particular noting the challenges of identifying Armed Forces families. In addition, respondents noted that communication with the wider Armed Forces community, such as bases and welfare teams, was often limited and inconsistent. **More consistent and effective contact** was viewed as a way to improve the effectiveness of support and maximise opportunities for Armed Forces children;
- **Resources:** several respondents noted the limited time available, and the potential benefit that would be derived from a greater proportion of dedicated staff time, specialist advice, dedicated funding and/or tailored resources. Others suggested that resources are available, but awareness of these needs to be increased;

- **Data:** two key points were raised relating to data:
  - Some respondents raised the potential value of increasing the data available relating to Service children, such as identifying and tracking their progress and outcomes in order to develop the evidence base related to their needs, opportunities and outcomes;
  - Others raised the potential value for individual support of a more consistent approach to data collection and sharing relating to individuals, to enable more effective use of targeted interventions and personalised support;
- **Policy solutions to core challenges:** some respondents suggested a need for policy responses to core challenges such as those identified in section 2.4.1. Examples included the development of an 'education passport' to support more effective transition between schools due to mobility, and fast-track assessments for children and young people from Armed Forces families who have additional support or learning needs.

Section 3 – Contribution of the Alliance

In addition to reviewing the state of the sector, the consultation explored the views of practitioners regarding the SCiP Alliance's contribution. Respondents were invited to comment on the impact of the Alliance in relation to its vision of *Thriving lives for children and young people from Armed Forces families*, and to the mission of bringing together practitioners to enhance practice and outcomes for this cohort.

> ## *Key messages in this section:*
>
> - **Practitioners familiar with the Alliance view it as having a positive impact on the lives of Armed Forces children.**
>
> - **There is an opportunity to enhance the contribution made by raising awareness** of the Alliance and strengthening impact evidence;
>
> - **There is strong agreement among practitioners that the SCiP Alliance has had a positive impact both on individual practice and on the community of professionals working with children and young people from Armed Forces families**. The greatest impact is identified by university respondents;
>
> - **SCiP Alliance resources, groups and events, research outputs and policy activities were all viewed as useful by those who had engaged with them.** There is considerable opportunity for further positive impact to be achieved by raising awareness of and engagement with these resources and activities across the sector;
>
> - Stakeholders have identified the significant contributions of the SCiP Alliance as:
>   - Building an **evidence base**;
>   - Developing evidence-based **tools and resources**;
>   - **Bringing people within the sector together**, developing a shared sense of purpose and creating fertile conditions for action;
>   - **Raising awareness** of children and young people from Armed Forces families, in particular among university respondents.

3.1   Thriving Lives

Questionnaire respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed that *The SCiP Alliance has had a positive impact on the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families*. The majority of respondents agreed with this statement, with 53% overall either *completely* or *mostly* agreeing, and just 6% disagreeing (fig 6). University/ college respondents expressed notably stronger agreement than other practitioner groups.

More than a third of respondents said they *Don't Know* if the Alliance has had a positive impact on the cohort (36%), rising to over half (52%) of respondents from schools. Two key explanations for this were identified from free text and interview responses:

- **A gap in awareness of and engagement with the SCiP Alliance-** several respondents said they were not aware of the SCiP Alliance, or did not feel sufficiently engaged with the work of the Alliance to express an opinion. Typically these were respondents who were relatively new in post, though some cited time constraints and a small number did not feel that the Alliance was relevant to their role;

- **Limited impact data-** several respondents noted that there was limited evidence of the impact of the work of the SCiP Alliance. This included respondents who were complimentary about the work of the Alliance and outlined contributions made to the community of practitioners working with children and young people from Armed Forces families, but were mindful that there was not yet evidence of a causal link between this and outcomes for the cohort.

Overall, this indicates that practitioners familiar with the Alliance view it as having a positive impact on the lives of Armed Forces children, but that there is significant work to do in raising awareness of the Alliance and strengthening impact evidence.
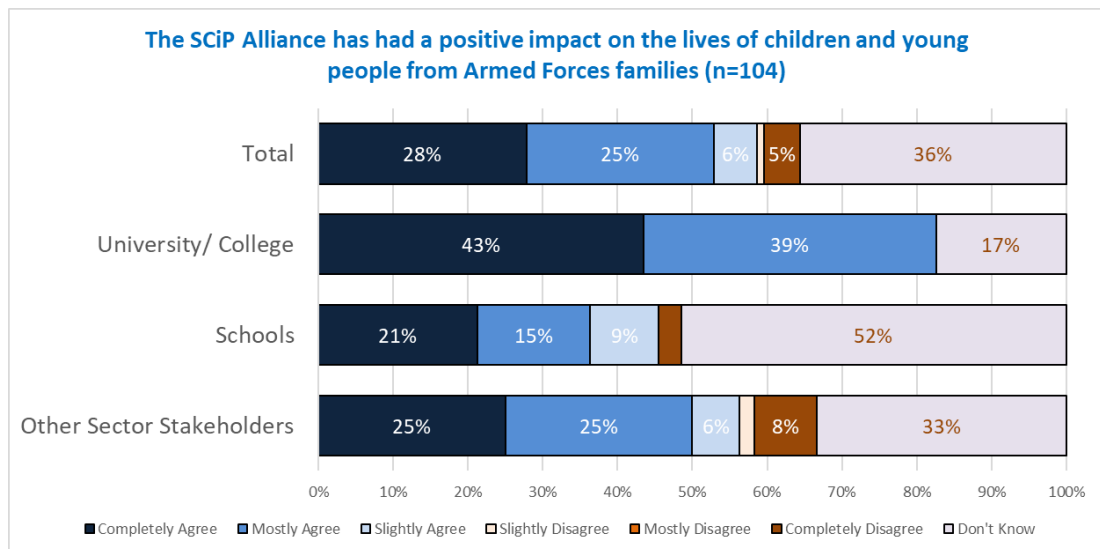
Fig 6: Stakeholder views on the impact of the SCiP Alliance on the lives of Armed Forces children.

3.2 Impact on Practice

Questionnaire respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed that contact with the SCiP Alliance had supported or enhanced their practice, and about the impact of the Alliance on the community of professionals working with children and young people from Armed Forces families.

Overall, there was strong agreement that the SCiP Alliance has had a positive impact on individual practice (fig 7) and the community (fig 8). It is worth noting variations in the views of different groups of practitioners, with a greater proportion of university/ college respondents strongly agreeing than for other groups. School respondents were much less likely to strongly agree. However, disagreement was low, with 45% of school respondents instead selecting *Don't Know*, again indicating that lack of awareness and/or engagement is the biggest gap.

Interestingly, a higher proportion of respondents across all groups were of the opinion that the SCiP Alliance has had greater positive impact on the community of professionals than on their own practice. This may be due to the nature of the noted contributions of the Alliance, which were typically more focussed on the community than individuals, and included:

- Building an **evidence base**;
- Bringing people together, developing a **shared sense of purpose** and action focus;
- Development of high quality, practically focussed, **evidence-based resources**;
- **Raising awareness** of Armed Forces children, especially in universities.
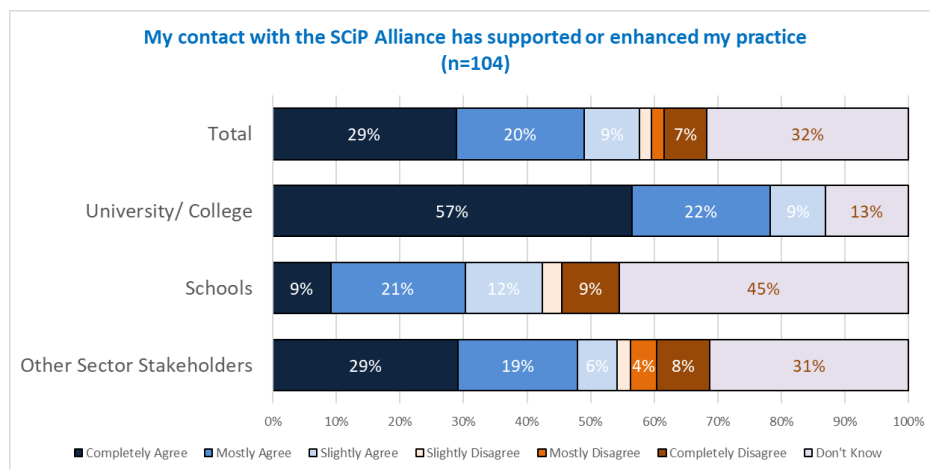
Fig 7: Stakeholder views on the impact of the SCiP Alliance on their practice.
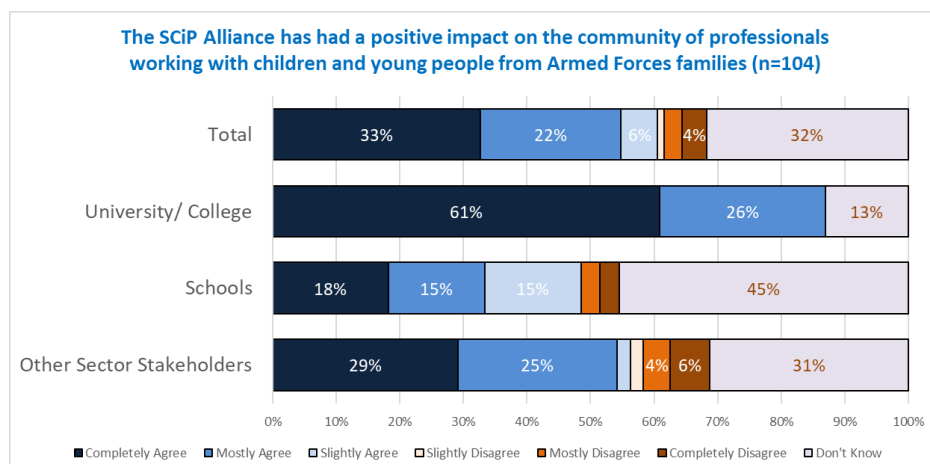
Fig 8: Stakeholder views on the impact of the SCiP Alliance on the community of professionals in the sector.

3.3 Practice, Research and Policy

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate how useful they had found specific elements of the SCiP Alliance's work since 2018, based on the key areas within the Alliance's theory of change: research, practice and policy.

3.3.1 Analysis by theme area

Figure 9 summarises the engagement reported by respondents with individual activities and outputs of the SCiP Alliance. Overall, 61% of respondents had engaged with at least one Alliance resource. Lower proportions had engaged with one or more groups or events (48%), research outputs (51%), and policy activities (37%).

A significant proportion of respondents were unaware of each of the listed items, in particular research outputs and policy activities. For each item, a small proportion of respondents (up to 16%) felt the item was not relevant to their role; but greater proportions had not engaged either due to lack of time, or lack of awareness.

Nevertheless, all of the listed items were viewed as useful by those who had engaged with them, though note that for some items this was a small number of respondents. For every item, more than half of respondents familiar with the activity or resource rated it as *extremely* or *very* useful, with the average being 61%.

With the diversity of membership of the Alliance, not every item is relevant to every member. Nevertheless, there is a consistent pattern that respondents rate SCiP Alliance activities and resources highly *if* a practitioner has made direct use of them and they are viewed as relevant to the practitioner's area of work.

3.3.2 Analysis by respondent subgroup

Engagement of the subgroups of practitioner respondents is explored in figure 10. This shows that engagement from university/ college respondents has been higher than for other groups, though we note that our sample is predominantly university widening participation and outreach practitioners, with under-representation from FE colleges and university student support practitioners. Respondents from schools reported the lowest level of engagement across all four areas.

Views on usefulness follow a similar pattern. Although more than half of respondents from all subgroups rate the items with which they have engaged either *extremely* or *very* useful, school respondents consistently give lower ratings than respondents from other subgroups, with university/ college respondents typically giving the highest ratings of usefulness.

To some extent, this is a reflection of the focus of much of the work of the SCiP Alliance since 2018. As discussed in section 2, the previous consultation identified significant gaps in the knowledge and confidence of university and college practitioners in relation to work with Armed Forces children. Notable changes have been observed among this group. Engagement and satisfaction with the SCiP Alliance outlined in figure 10 suggests that the SCiP Alliance has at least contributed to this change, an assertion supported by comments from university respondents:

"It has been a pleasure working with SCiP Alliance and I have learned much about the particular barriers and positive skills children and young people from Armed Forces have."

"There was nothing to offer Service Children 5 years ago – working with SCiP is the single factor that has changed how we support service children locally."

"They've been really, really helpful with giving us some support for understanding the groups a bit more and starting some of those conversations going."

Please tell us which of these resources you have used (n=113):

Resource	Yes, I have used this resource	No, I haven't had the time to use this	No, I was not aware of this resource	No, this is not relevant to my role
Student-facing and practitioner resource banks	13%	19%	53%	15%
Online Targeting tool	18%	14%	55%	13%
Utilising good practice guidance, e.g. Creative Forces Day template	29%	21%	36%	13%
Thriving Lives Toolkit and associated resources	49%	16%	23%	12%

How useful have these been (if used)?

Resource	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Student-facing and practitioner resource banks	41%	41%	18%		
Online Targeting tool	43%	35%	22%		
Utilising good practice guidance	45%	37%	18%		
Thriving Lives Toolkit and associated resources	56%	28%	12%		

Please tell us in which of these groups or events you have participated (n=110):

Event	Yes, I have participated	No, I haven't had the time to participate	No, I was not aware of this group or event	No, this is not relevant to my role
Thematic research-practice-policy events, such as the Listening to Learn report launch and the…	6%	27%	50%	16%
Training events, such as the Thriving Lives training conferences	33%	24%	35%	8%
SCiP Alliance annual conference	35%	30%	32%	4%
SCiP Alliance Hub Network	43%	21%	30%	

How useful have these been?

Event	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Thematic research-practice-policy events	25%	38%	38%		
Training events	53%	32%	16%		
SCiP Alliance annual conference	55%	24%	18%		
SCiP Alliance Hub Network	54%	28%	15%		

Please tell us of which SCiP Alliance research outputs you are aware: (n=107):

Research output	Yes, I am aware and this is relevant to my role	No, I was not aware of this research output	Yes, I am aware, but this is not relevant to my role
Stakeholder Consultation (2018)	22%	76%	
Thriving Lives Toolkit research (2019)	57%	37%	5%
Listening to Learn (2020)	22%	70%	7%
Post-16 scoping reports (2021)	20%	73%	7%

How useful have these been?

Research output	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Stakeholder Consultation (2018)	25%	38%	33%	4%	
Thriving Lives Toolkit research (2019)	50%	31%	17%		
Listening to Learn (2020)	26%	30%	37%	7%	
Post-16 scoping reports (2021)	19%	43%	29%	5%	5%

Please tell us of which SCiP Alliance policy activities you are aware: (n=105):

Policy activity	Yes, I am aware and this is relevant to my role	No, I was not aware of this policy activity	Yes, I am aware, but this is not relevant to my role
Informing the sector about the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families through delivering conference presentations…	34%	56%	10%
Advocating for policy change, e.g. responding to national policy consultations or working with UCAS to implement a tick box for applicants to…	35%	51%	13%
Policy events such as the FE summit (2021)	20%	70%	10%
Disseminating research and community consultation evidence	30%	63%	7%

How useful have these been?

Policy activity	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Informing the sector about the lives…	64%	19%	14%		
Advocating for policy change	54%	30%	13%		
Policy events such as the FE summit (2021)	33%	40%	20%	7%	
Disseminating research and community consultation evidence	50%	25%	23%		

Fig 9: Stakeholder engagement with SCiP Alliance activities and outputs, and views of how useful these have been in supporting work with children and young people from Armed Forces families.

Proportion of stakeholder subgroups engaging with Alliance resources (n=113):

	3 or more resources used	1 or 2 resources used	None of the listed resources used
Total	28%	33%	39%
University/ College	55%	10%	34%
Schools	16%	38%	47%
Other Sector Stakeholders	24%	42%	35%

How useful have these been (if used)?

	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Total	43%	32%	22%		
University/ College	55%	25%	20%		
Schools	26%	38%	34%		
Other Sector Stakeholders	43%	35%	18%		

Proportion of stakeholder subgroups attending Alliance groups or events (n=110):

	3 or more attended	1 or 2 attended	Not attended any listed groups or events
Total	19%	29%	52%
University/ College	31%	38%	31%
Schools	7%	29%	64%
Other Sector Stakeholders	24%	24%	53%

How useful?

	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Total	53%	29%	18%		
University/ College	58%	31%	11%		
Schools	38%	41%	21%		
Other Sector Stakeholders	56%	22%	22%		

Proportion of subgroups aware of Alliance research relevant to their role (n=107):

	3 or more	1 or 2	No relevant research outputs
Total	14%	37%	49%
University/ College	21%	45%	34%
Schools	7%	27%	67%
Other Sector Stakeholders	16%	42%	42%

How useful?

	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Total	36%	34%	26%	4%	
University/ College	39%	37%	21%		
Schools	33%	19%	48%		
Other Sector Stakeholders	34%	37%	23%	6%	

Proportion aware of Alliance policy activities relevant to their role (n=105):

	3 or more	1 or 2	No relevant policy outputs
Total	19%	18%	63%
University/ College	31%	31%	38%
Schools	7%	9%	84%
Other Sector Stakeholders	24%	18%	58%

How useful?

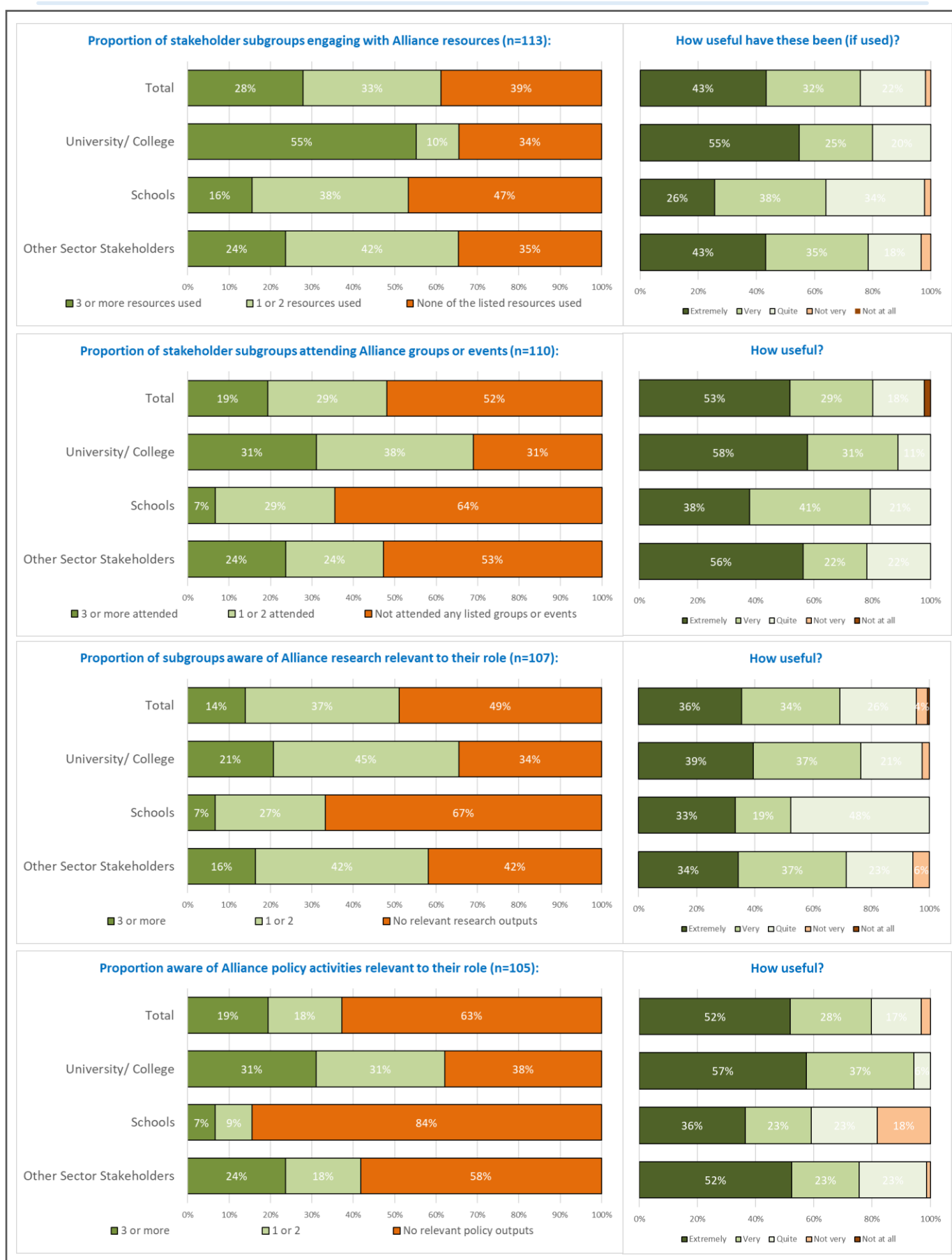|	Extremely	Very	Quite	Not very	Not at all
Total	52%	28%	17%		
University/ College	57%	37%	6%		
Schools	36%	23%	23%	18%	
Other Sector Stakeholders	52%	23%	23%		

Fig 10: Engagement of stakeholder subgroups with the practice, research and policy areas of SCiP Alliance activity. 'No relevant' research or policy outputs combines those who are not aware of the listed outputs with those who said they were aware of the output, but it isn't relevant to their role. 'Usefulness' combines all ratings for outputs within the category from respondents who have engaged/ are aware and view as relevant to their role.

3.4 Thriving Lives Toolkit

The *Thriving Lives Toolkit*, and the research on which it is based, are the pieces of SCiP Alliance work that have been engaged with by the greatest proportion of respondents. Almost half of questionnaire respondents have used the toolkit (fig 11). This includes a third of school respondents (33%), but a greater proportion of other sector stakeholders (54%) and university/ college respondents (53%).

The toolkit is viewed to be very useful, with 84% of respondents rating it as either *extremely* or *very* useful. This is consistent across the stakeholder groups, suggesting that there is considerable potential impact to be achieved if awareness of the toolkit can be increased, especially among schools. Although lack of awareness among schools offers an opportunity, several respondents noted that a lack of time and difficulties securing the buy-in of their senior leadership teams presented significant barriers to use of the resource.
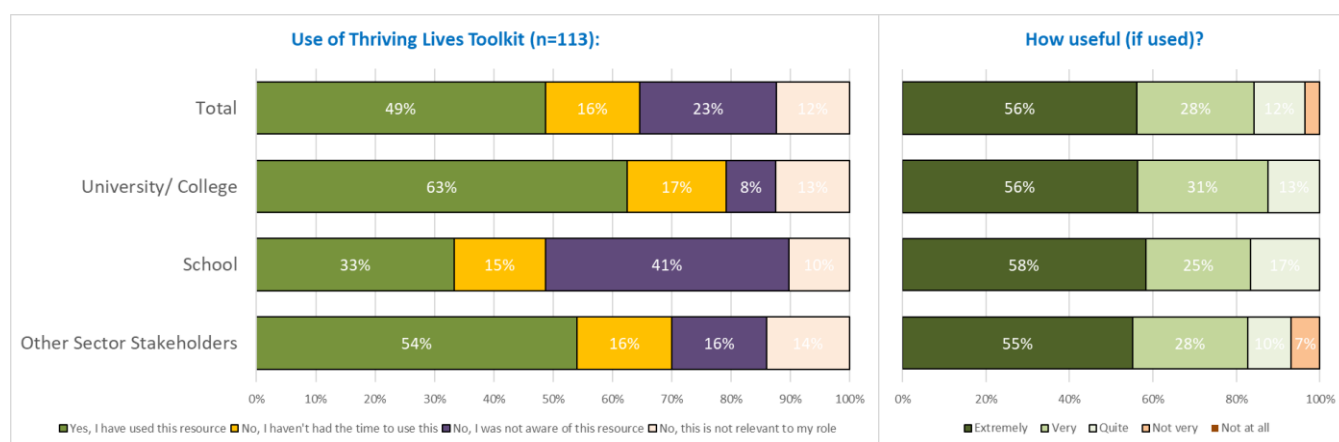
Fig 11: Engagement of stakeholder subgroups with the Thriving Lives Toolkit.

3.5 Other Significant Contributions

Stakeholders identified four key areas in which they felt the SCiP Alliance had significantly contributed since 2018.

3.5.1 Building an evidence base

Several respondents highlighted the importance of research, and of being able to cite sound evidence as the foundation for actions and recommendations. The SCiP Alliance was noted as having undertaken significant research. Mention was also made of the Alliance contributing by building connections between researchers and practitioners, and increasing dissemination of useful learning.

> "There's an awful lot of research going on in different levels into all the issues that Armed Forces families and children see. Actually, I think SCiP are very good at identifying those people that are doing so […] and bringing them into that network. We then learn about that piece of research. It's not research that then just sits on a shelf."

3.5.2 Development of high quality, evidence-based tools and resources

The SCiP Alliance was recognised by respondents as a trusted source of information, and an organisation with notable success with regards to turning ideas into action. Some respondents noted that, because the Alliance doesn't undertake frontline delivery, it is well placed to develop tools and resources that draw on a range of

perspectives and a wider body of evidence, increasing the wider applicability of the results. By ensuring that tools and resources are evidence-based, this increases their credibility, which in turn helps secure the engagement of senior managers.

"SCiP has been able to make things happen and get things done."

"We know it's an evidence-based tool. We've been able to measure our impact against the tool […and] take to our executives which is really, really helpful, so we can show them exactly how we are supporting our Armed Forces families in an evidence-based way."

"It's really good to know that what you're promoting or what you're sharing has a very solid base behind it […] You know that when a school looks at it, or someone within that sector looks at it, that it doesn't immediately fall apart with a little bit of scrutiny."

"I think the fact they've got the network and Hubs enables them to make resources that can be applied to a wider audience, and are appropriate."

"I think yes, it's really always helpful to be able to point towards stronger, non-partisan evidence which has been […] generated to keep in line with good practice in terms of what research evidence should look like from an education perspective."

3.5.3 Building a network

Several respondents highlighted the key role that the SCiP Alliance has had in bringing people within the sector together, developing a shared sense of purpose and creating fertile conditions for action. This happens at both a national and local level. Some respondents noted that there are challenges related to balancing consistency with responding to local conditions, which presents an opportunity for future development. The benefits of enabling practitioners to connect with each other are substantial, and provide a powerful resource for future work.

"They provide […] a way that we can all collaborate better together to use our resources to improve the lives of Service children in schools."

"It's the best of both worlds. You've got national coverage, but then you've got local knowledge, the understanding and different skills."

"I think it's the structure that has enabled that regional set up and I think that's really important."

3.5.4 Raising awareness of Armed Forces children

University respondents in particular noted that the SCiP Alliance had significantly increased awareness of Armed Forces children. This has increased recognition of this group within widening participation agendas, and helped secure agreement with a UCAS marker to enable future data collection and continued building of the evidence base.

"Just opening people's eyes and sort of illuminating the cases. As I say […] it hadn't really occurred to me that they would be a specific group that have particular difficulties with gaining access to Higher Education."

"I think one of the big impacts was lobbying UCAS to get the declaration of military families on the application form. I think it will have huge long term benefits for this group. I think one of the biggest challenges we face is a lot of people almost saying why do we need to help them […] Actually identifying them more routinely in the data will help with the research side of things to identify where these students need support, more and more, which should help university, schools, everyone stand up and go, okay, we do need to help these students like we do our SEND, like we do our care-experienced, these students also need support."

3.6 Opportunities for Increasing Impact

The consultation identified a number of areas that some respondents felt might enable the SCiP Alliance to increase both reach and impact.

3.6.1 Policy impacts

The SCiP Alliance has made notable progress in relation to two of its key areas of focus: research and practice. There has been less notable progress to date in relation to the third area: policy. This can be explained to some extent by policy change typically taking place over a longer timeframe, and typically coming after research findings and practice developments. Given the progress made in relation to research and practice, this may be a suitable time to review the opportunities for policy influence, and consider how the SCiP Alliance could best deliver this.

3.6.2 Parental engagement

Some frontline practitioners in particular noted that parental awareness of the SCiP Alliance is low, a view supported by the family respondents to the online questionnaire. This is not necessarily an issue that needs to be addressed, as the SCiP Alliance does not undertake frontline delivery, even though it has significant engagement from stakeholders who do. Nevertheless, parents and carers may have an as yet untapped role to play, for example by raising awareness of the Alliance and its resources with schools. Exploring the opportunities for parents to engage with the Alliance as stakeholders may offer significant potential benefits.

3.6.3 Widening focus

Several respondents noted the relatively narrow focus of the SCiP Alliance when first established, looking at progression of young people from Armed Forces families to further and higher education. This focus has broadened somewhat to include a more inclusive consideration of education and progression; but some stakeholders feel it should be wider still. These views cover two main suggestions:

- Extending the age-range considered, e.g. including Early Years and/or early career progression;
- Broadening the focus to engage with other aspects of wellbeing.

There is a balance to be struck between delivering meaningful impact in a closely defined area of focus, and engaging with the complexity of factors that have a bearing on thriving lives. Many respondents cautioned against the Alliance attempting to do too much, and/ or noted that the membership includes a wide range of practitioners who are well-placed to highlight appropriate points of connection with other sectors. Opinions differ on the best approach, and there may be value in exploring this in more detail to ensure the most effective balance between the opportunities of broadening the Alliance's focus, and the risk of diluting the Alliance's mission.

3.6.4 Engaging with the diversity of settings across the UK

It is widely acknowledged that there is considerable diversity in the experiences of children and young people from Armed Forces families based on a range of factors, including the branch and rank of a family member's service, or whether they attend a school with a large or small number of Armed Forces children. There is also diversity due to some of the strategic challenges outlined in section 2.4.2, such as

the different policy contexts of the home nations and variations in school governance accountability. Some respondents felt that there was still work to be done to fully engage with some of these factors, but that to do so offered considerable potential for the SCiP Alliance to achieve consistently effective impact across the full range of circumstances experienced by Armed Forces children.

3.6.5 Evidence of impact

The consultation identified that many practitioners are of the view that significant progress has been made in building an evidence base related to the needs of and opportunities for children and young people from Armed Forces families. Continuing this focus on strengthening the evidence base was seen as important, along with reviewing the impact of work undertaken in the sector. Two areas in particular were identified by a number of stakeholders:

- Tracking outcomes for children and young people from Armed Forces families;
- Developing mechanisms to evaluate the impact of the SCiP Alliance.

Section 4 – The Future Role of the Alliance

This section explores the views of stakeholders on the future role of the SCiP Alliance. Responses from the consultation questionnaire, stakeholder interviews and discussions at the stakeholder workshop have been analysed to identify suggested priorities for the SCiP Alliance. Each of these represents an area of focus that was identified by multiple perspectives, and so reflects the shared sense of purpose expressed by Alliance stakeholders.

Key messages in this section:

- **Stakeholders value the Alliance's network of practitioners**, viewing it as enabling connections to be made, knowledge and expertise shared, and partnerships to be built;

- **Stakeholders place high value on the evidence base** that the SCiP Alliance has helped to build and disseminate. Practitioners feel confident in using or promoting the evidence-based resources and practice developed or recommended by the Alliance;

- **Stakeholders view priorities for the SCiP Alliance to be**:
    - Consolidating and embedding success to date;
    - Bringing people together, supporting networking and collaboration;
    - Identifying areas for potential policy influence, using the evidence base;
    - Developing an evaluation framework to evidence the impact of the Alliance.

4.1 Consolidating and Embedding Success

There have been several notable, step change developments that have been led or supported by the SCiP Alliance. Examples include the development of the *Thriving Lives Toolkit* and the UCAS marker. Developments like these offer significant potential for transformative impact; but realising this potential and evidencing its impact requires ongoing work. A key aspect of this is maintaining ongoing communication with practitioners, and ensuring resources remain a point of focus as staff teams change, and management/policy agendas shift.

Suggestions have been made for developing different versions of the toolkit for different settings (e.g. Early Years and post-16), and to establish a regular review and development process so that it becomes a dynamic resource. Activities such as introducing the toolkit within initial teacher training, and producing an accreditation mark for schools, were suggested as ways of embedding the resource into practice. There would be value in exploring these options and developing a plan for optimum impact from this resource.

4.2 Networking and Collaboration

The Alliance brings people with a shared interest together, and this is valued by practitioners. Continued development of the Hub network, alongside other networking opportunities, offers considerable value to the community. The aim should be to get the

right people in the right room at the right time, continuing to seek buy in from organisations across the sector considering the holistic needs of Armed Forces children. The Alliance is also strengthened by activities which promote communication throughout the network, such as development of an online community, regular events (face-to-face and online) and newsletters.

There would be value in reviewing the coverage and function of the Hubs as part of an iterative development process. A key strength of the Hubs is enabling regional and national opportunities to shape responses to and understanding of UK-wide priorities. There is an opportunity for the Hubs to play a greater role in shaping how the Alliance as a whole responds to new opportunities and developments (e.g. policy changes, local government restructures, impact of the UCAS flag).

It would also be worthwhile reviewing the consistency of the value of networks, in particular considering their inclusivity and relevance. There are opportunities to engage more effectively with different contexts, such as devolved policy, which could add considerable value to the Alliance's overall impact.

Some sectors/ stakeholders have been identified who have not been central to the Alliance's work to date, but are an important part of the lives of Armed Forces families, such as practitioners in health and social care. The Alliance is focussed on education and progression, and other aspects of health and wellbeing are outside the scope of the Alliance's work. Nevertheless, there are interdependencies between education and other aspects of wellbeing that could be usefully explored without diluting focus, in order to advance the Alliance's mission.

4.3   Policy Influence

Practitioners noted that the majority of the Alliance's success to date has been in the areas of research and enhancing practice. There is significant potential for the learning from this work to guide effective policy development. Using the evidence base, the Alliance should give attention to identifying pragmatic policy developments that would offer the most significant and sustained positive impact for children and young people from Armed Forces families. Once identified, a plan of action should be devised for building an evidence-based case for change, and engaging with appropriate partners to advance and monitor the ongoing impact of policy change.

4.4   Continued Development of the Evidence Base

Practitioners noted the value of the SCiP Alliance's focus on evidence based practice. There is a strong desire for continued engagement with researchers to further build understanding of the needs and opportunities for children and young people from Armed Forces families, and develop data tracking and embedded data collection. This includes data on the progression of FE/HE students (e.g. reasons for drop-out; destinations). This should be accompanied by effective dissemination of research findings, and a focus on translating these into useful and used tools to further develop effective practice.

4.5   Evaluating Impact

The importance attached to evidence based practice extends to understanding the Alliance's own contribution. It was suggested that an evaluation framework should be developed to assess and evidence the impact of the Alliance. This should also form an ongoing cycle of learning and development in order to further build the Alliance's reputation and impact.

Section 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The key findings of the consultation are:

- Overall, stakeholders feel that the SCiP Alliance has had a **positive impact on professional practice** relating to children and young people from Armed Forces families. The greatest impact has been felt by university and college respondents to the consultation, though we note our FE college sample may not be fully representative;

- Overall, practitioners familiar with the Alliance view it as having **a positive impact on the lives of Armed Forces children**. There is considerable opportunity to further enhance this impact by **raising awareness** of the Alliance, and the resources available;

- The Alliance's development of **evidence-based good practice**, and **research** to build the evidence base relating to this cohort, is highly valued. Practitioners also value the opportunities to network with others that is made possible by the Alliance;

- Significant progress has been made in relation to the research and practice elements of the Alliance's theory of change. There has been less progress to date in relation to the policy element, though the evidence and learning from research and practice provides a good foundation on which to build a plan for **future policy influence**.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the future focus of the SCiP Alliance:

- **We recommend focussing primarily on consolidating the success of the SCiP Alliance to date, ahead of identifying new initiatives.** This involves, for example:
  - extending use of the *Thriving Lives Toolkit*, working to embed this within recognised best practice for work with Armed Forces children. Options for developing other versions of the toolkit should also be considered;
  - nurturing the Hub network to ensure that early enthusiasm for engagement is sustained, connections with a breadth of knowledge and skills relevant to the mission are continually reviewed, and that activity leads to demonstrable positive impact for Armed Forces children;
  - reviewing communications to ensure effective relationships are sustained with those familiar with the Alliance, but also that key messages reach those not yet engaged with the Alliance, but who may find value in connecting;

- **We recommend developing a strategy for policy influence.** The greatest potential for sustained positive impact at scale is through influencing policy at local or national level. The SCiP Alliance has made significant progress with developing the evidence base and enhancing practice. This provides a good foundation for credible, evidence-based policy development. We suggest this is led by a specific working group within the Alliance, identifying objectives and timescales, but with strong connections to the research and practice expertise within the community;

- **We recommend reviewing the geographical engagement with the Alliance.** The number of Armed Forces children varies by location, and other local circumstances will affect the relevance of and engagement with the Alliance. Nevertheless, there is value in proactively reviewing the pattern of engagement, and considering how different approaches, e.g. in devolved nations, may increase reach and impact;

- **We recommend developing an impact evaluation framework.** Developing processes to understand and evidence the impact of the SCiP Alliance, and inform future priorities.