SCiP Alliance Thriving Lives Toolkit Enhancement Project

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Staunton, T., Rogosic, K. (2021). Labour market information and social justice: a critical examination. International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance.

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Following the undertaking of research in England in 2019, which led to the development of the Thriving Lives Toolkit by the Service Children's Progression Alliance, an enhancement project was undertaken in 2020/21 which saw research being undertaken to understand the context of the Armed Forces and Service children across the rest of the UK. The enhancement project looks at the contextual factors which may affect usage of the Toolkit across other UK nations and aims to identify and ensure that the Toolkit is suitable for all who can benefit from it.
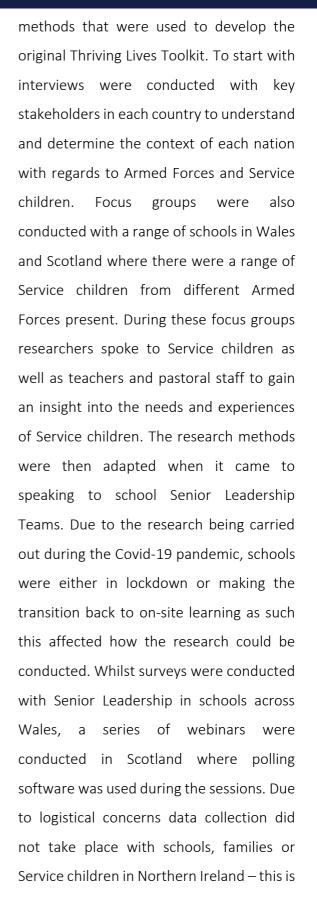
Research aim and objective

The aim of the research project was to *'enhance the Thriving Lives Toolkit to ensure it meets the needs of all Service children in the UK'*.

The objective of the research project was to *'understand the needs of Service children across the UK and identify the extent to which the Thriving Lives toolkit meets these'*.

Methodology

The research methods that were undertaken for this project built upon the methods that were used to develop the original Thriving Lives Toolkit. To start with interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in each country to understand and determine the context of each nation with regards to Armed Forces and Service children. Focus groups were also conducted with a range of schools in Wales and Scotland where there were a range of Service children from different Armed Forces present. During these focus groups researchers spoke to Service children as well as teachers and pastoral staff to gain an insight into the needs and experiences of Service children. The research methods were then adapted when it came to speaking to school Senior Leadership Teams. Due to the research being carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were either in lockdown or making the transition back to on-site learning as such this affected how the research could be conducted. Whilst surveys were conducted with Senior Leadership in schools across Wales, a series of webinars were conducted in Scotland where polling software was used during the sessions. Due to logistical concerns data collection did not take place with schools, families or Service children in Northern Ireland – this is

something that may be possible in future research.

The data from the interviews and focus groups was then analysed using the NVivo data analysis software. Due to the pandemic all research was carried out virtually using video conferencing software.

Findings

The findings from the research are presented in a format that discusses Wales and Scotland separately as this enables the contextual differences of each nation to be identified and explained. The context of the countries including schooling, curriculum, local authorities and organisations vary and so it is best to discuss each nation separately. The findings from both Wales and Scotland are presented first followed by a discussion around the experiences of all Service children involved in the research.

Wales

The Welsh curriculum played a significant role in the context of understanding the experiences of Service children in Wales, particularly the importance of the Welsh language and its incorporation into the everyday curriculum. In recent years the Supporting Service Children in Education

Wales (SSCE Cymru) programme has been established and is working hard to build relationships with local authorities and schools across the country. The research in Wales found that:

- Service families in Wales were less transient and families often stayed in the country for prolonged periods of time.

- The Welsh language is present in all schools across Wales and learning the language is compulsory. Help is available within schools to support the children arriving from different countries and in North Wales where many schools are Welsh medium, MoD funding is available for independent schooling.

- Ensuring that Service children are celebrated was an important factor for both stakeholders and schools in the research. Whilst it was acknowledged that Service children do face challenges it was also stated that they can bring a wealth of knowledge and experiences to the classroom.

- A concern was raised for Service children who had additional learning needs and special educational needs and disabilities.

This was due to the different terminologies that are used across England, Wales and Scotland and the fact that health plans and statements cannot be carried across countries.

- Unlike England, Wales and Scotland do not have Service Pupil Premium funding and as such there is no requirement for schools to report on their Service children. As a result, this makes it difficult to track and monitor the children and their school moves.

Scotland

Across the research project it was important to acknowledge that education in Scotland has significant differences to the other UK nations. The education system in Scotland is overseen by Education Scotland which is a Scottish Government executive agency. Within Education Scotland a framework is used called the Curriculum for Excellence which sets out to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities of:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors.

In Scotland it is also important to be aware of the differences in the age at which formal primary and secondary school begins due to children starting school at different ages depending on their birthdays. Additionally, the differences in curriculum, school leadership and direction in schools in Scotland is more influenced by local authorities than in England.

Recently Armed Forces Champions have been introduced by Skills Development Scotland as a way to act as links between the forces and school career advisers. The champions are able to engage with schools to communicate with them regarding any deployment taking place and can ensure that the school is able to support and monitor the Service children.

The research in Scotland found that:

- Governance and quality assurance is very different to other nations. A school's performance is monitored via the self-evaluation tool 'How Good Is My School' (HGIOS) and schools in Scotland do not have Governing bodies and are not evaluated by an inspectorate.
- The term 'Service child' is not recognised terminology in Scotland, instead the term 'Armed Forces

child' is used consistently across the country.

- Like Wales there was a concern about Service children getting 'lost in the system' when moving schools. The issue here is that the children may not be receiving the full support they need because schools are not aware of their status.

- Again, Scotland like Wales do not receive Service Pupil Premium and so rely on funding through the MoD Education Support Fund. This led school staff to believe that there are only limited resources available to them to support the Service children because of the lack of funding. This also relates to the ability to be able to track children in the country.

- Support is needed for schools and families where there are significant cultural differences. Participants noted how families from different cultures were often not aware of what was legal and illegal when it came to care of their children. As such schools had added additions to their welcome handbooks to help with these issues.

Experiences of the Service children

Research with the Service children across Wales and Scotland found that the children shared very similar views and experiences. The research found that:

- A buddy system was often used when moving to a new school. The children found this a helpful way of making new friends and feeling as though they were being looked after for the first few days at the school.

- The children unsurprisingly noted that they often found it difficult having to leave friends at their old schools when moving. Despite this they were seen to be ready to make new friends and found it a good experience for their social skills.

- Whilst many of the children were used to their parent(s) going on deployment many also still found it difficult whilst they were away. The children often confided in friends and sometimes school staff. The children found comfort in their MoD communities who would often run events whilst deployment was taking place.

- The importance of the children having access to someone to talk to

was key. Someone who could offer wellbeing and emotional support in the school was very important to the children.

Thriving Lives Toolkit recommendations

Overall, the Thriving Lives Toolkit received very positive feedback from participants in both Scotland and Wales, however there a few recommendations that came out through conversations.

1. Terminology – The toolkit should avoid using terminology which is Anglocentric. For example, the terms 'Service child' and 'governor' are not terms used in Scotland.

2. Acknowledgment of funding differences in Wales and Scotland compared to that in England. Generic references to funding would be more applicable to use throughout the toolkit.

About the research project

In 2020 the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust provided funding to the Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance to scale-up an evidence-based school support framework across the UK so that schools everywhere can develop better support for Service children whose wellbeing and learning can suffer from the stress and disruption of mobility and separation. This research project has built upon earlier research carried out by the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) for the SCiP Alliance (Burke et al, 2019) which contributed to the well-received Thriving Lives Toolkit. In this new piece of research, the research continued with the robust approach adopted within the initial project to identify what contextual differences exist in Scotland, and Wales (with the intention of also conducting some research in Northern Ireland) and explored how this might influence understanding and use of the toolkit in these nations. The present research also comprised a second part, the aim of which was to identify schools' usage of the toolkit and the impacts that this manifested on schools, their staff, Service children and their families. The research project has been undertaken in two parts; this report focusses on Part A which saw research undertaken in Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland to identify contextual differences and to understand how, if at all, this might influence understanding and use of the toolkit in these nations. Part B of the research identifies what progress schools across the U.K have made in implementing the toolkit and the associated impacts of doing so, this is the subject of separate outputs.

Methodology

The empirical research for this project has been developed to ensure that robust data was collated to build an evidence base for the enhancement of the SCiP Thriving Lives Toolkit. As such, methods were chosen that would enable the development of recommendations for future developments of the Thriving Lives Toolkit thereby allowing for an all-encompassing approach across all four UK nations. A grounded theory approach was undertaken based on the findings from the previous research undertaken in England which developed the original Thriving Lives Toolkit.

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Aim:

The aim of the research project was to *'enhance the Thriving Lives Toolkit to ensure it meets the needs of all Service children in the UK'*.

Objective:

Understand the needs of Service children across the UK and identify the extent to which the Thriving Lives toolkit meets these.

Developmental research across Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland

The initial aim of Part A of the research was to replicate the methodology of the original research which informed the development of the current Thriving Lives Toolkit. As a result of this similar research questions were asked to Stakeholders across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland including;

1. What provision and support is available to Service children in schools?
2. What challenges are Service children perceived to experience?
3. What strategies have schools employed to support Service children?
4. What do Service children identify as being problematic?
5. How effective have school strategies been for Service children?

Northern Ireland

Whilst there are British armed forces bases located in Northern Ireland (Army – Thiepval Barracks; Royal Navy – Lisburn; RAF – Aldergrove), due to logistical issues, interviews with schools, families and Service children were not feasible to undertake in the country at the time the research was undertaken. We do however hope that there will be future possibilities that would allow this to take place.

The research team was however able to conduct an interview with an appropriate Ministry of Defence representative for Northern Ireland, as well as interviews with key stakeholders

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including Families Federation representatives from the Army, Navy and RAF who support armed forces families across the UK with any personal or work-related help that is required.

Data collection

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools across the UK adaptions were made to ensure that the research could be undertaken in a way that would cause as little disruption to schools, staff and Service children as possible. The initial stages of the project looked similar across both nations with interviews taking place with key stakeholders and policy makers within those administrations. Table 1 shows the list of stakeholders interviewed as part of the research with information on their organisations and job titles.

Table 1 - List of Stakeholders and job roles for each country

Country	Organisation	Job Title
Wales	Ministry of Defence	Education Officer
Wales	Ministry of Defence	Reservist
Wales	Ministry of Defence	SEND Education Officer
Wales	SSCE Cymru	Project Manager
Wales	SSCE Cymru	Regional Schools Liaison Officer
Wales	Estyn	Inspector
Wales	Careers Wales	Manager
Wales	Welsh Government	Armed Forces Liaison Officer + Veteran
Scotland	Royal Caledonian Education Trust	Programme Officer
Scotland	Skills Development Scotland	Policy Lead
Scotland	Skills Development Scotland	Forces Lead
Scotland	Army	Welfare Office
Scotland	Association of Directors of Education	Transitions Officer
Scotland	Scottish Government	Transitions Officer
Northern Ireland	Ministry of Defence	Education Officer
UK	Army Families Federation	Education and Childcare

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UK	Naval Families Federation	Engagement Officer
UK	Naval Families Federation	Policy Advisor
UK	RAF Families Federation	Policy Advisor

School Leadership

Where the research methods differed between administrations was with the involvement of the school Senior Leadership Teams. There was concern expressed by key Stakeholders in Scotland about engaging schools for the purpose of the research because of the focus on Covid-19 and 'catching up' following closures, in addition to the added pressures of ensuring that the children's learning was taking place. Consequently, in Scotland, two online webinars were held by iCeGS, the Royal Caledonian Education Trust (RCET), now Forces Children Scotland, and The SCiP Alliance using the University of Derby's teaching platform Blackboard Collaborate. These events were directed to schools and other organisations working with Service children across Scotland and offered presentations and discussions on policies, support for Service children and the existing Thriving Lives Toolkit. During the webinars, attendees were asked to respond to poll questions which mimicked those used in the survey sent out across England in 2019 and to schools in Wales in 2021. Attendees were also encouraged to participate in discussions to share best practice and experiences and this provided an opportunity to ask open ended questions regarding practice from the survey.

In Wales, a survey was developed in Google Forms which was then disseminated through the Supporting Service Children in Education Wales (SSCE Cymru) programme and their hubs across Wales. Whilst the survey response rate was low (14 responses), which was explained by SSCE Cymru, like Scotland, by the pressures of Covid-19, the results that were gathered came from a wide range of schools (9 primary, 4 secondary, 1 SEND) across Wales. There was a range of school sizes, with students on roll varying from 74 to 1280. The number of Service children on roll in these schools varied from 1-90 and the school's experiences of working with Service children was evenly split between 1 and 4 years and 5 and ten years. We were conscious that the research gained perspectives across all armed forces and therefore we ensured that research took place within school that had a range of children from different service families.

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Focus Groups

The final part of the research consisted of undertaking a series of focus groups with Service children and school staff across Wales and Scotland. As part of the research team there were two researchers who were knowledgeable of the Scottish and Welsh educational systems who conducted the focus groups (one in each nation) so they were aware of the contextual differences in policy and education. Again, because of the pandemic, the focus groups were all undertaken via online conferencing technology, mainly Microsoft Teams. Focus groups with Service children and school staff were undertaken separately, however there was always a member of staff present in each student focus group, in part for safeguarding and in part to facilitate use of the technology. The Service children had been selected by staff to participate in the focus group, and at the start of each session the children were given an explanation of who the researchers were, why they wanted to speak to the children and what we wanted to discuss with them. Whilst parental consent had already been gathered prior to the research taking place, the researchers also gathered verbal consent prior to asking any questions. The numbers of Service children and staff who participated in the focus groups varied as to who had availability at the time of research. Table 2 highlights the types of schools that participated in the focus groups including the numbers of individuals who took part.

Table 2- Overview of Focus Group participants

Country	Type of school	Number of Students Interviewed	Number of Staff Interviewed
Wales	Secondary School	8	2
Wales	Secondary School	6	2
Wales	Primary School	5	1
Wales	Primary School (Independent)	15	2
Scotland	Secondary School	6	5
Scotland	Secondary School	6	2
Scotland	Primary School	6	3

Analysis

The recordings of the focus groups and stakeholder interviews were transcribed and analysed using NVivo. This process involved uploading all interview and focus group transcripts into the data analysis programme and thematically coding the data into areas of emerging interest. By doing this we were able to see developing themes and this also allowed for comparison across the fieldwork carried out in both Scotland and Wales.

Key Findings

The following key findings of the research are presented in a way that discusses Wales and Scotland separately so that contextual differences of each nation can be identified and explained. Despite many common views, the context of the country including schooling, curriculum, local authorities and organisations vary and so cannot be discussed as one. The findings from Wales are presented first followed by those from Scotland, this will then lead to a section which discusses the experiences of all Service children involved in the research. The decision to group the Service children together is based on the finding that there were no demonstrable differences in their experiences, they all shared similar thoughts and perspectives on their lives as a Service child.

Wales

In Wales there are both Welsh-medium and English-medium schools. The Welsh Government aims to ensure that all children have the option of being educated in Welsh and so Welsh is taught as part of the main curriculum in all schools up to the age of 16. As part of this, there is the option for schools to either teach lessons entirely or mostly in Welsh. 'Welsh-medium' schools are schools where children are taught in Welsh. Children going to these schools also get a good grounding in English language skills, but schools are not required by law to teach in English in Years 1 and 2.

In January 2020 there were 1480 maintained schools in Wales and 446 Welsh medium-schools (Welsh Government, 2020a). Schools in Wales are currently undergoing a curriculum overhaul seeing the introduction of the New Curriculum for Wales which will begin to be formally rolled out in schools from 2022 (Welsh Government, 2020b).

There are two RAF bases located across Wales, RAF St Athan (South Glamorgan) and RAF Valley (Isle of Anglesey) (RAF, 2020), no naval bases and four army bases. In South Wales there is Beachley Barracks (Monmouthshire), in Central Wales there are Dering Lines and The Barracks Brecon (Powys) and in Southwest Wales there is Cawdor Barracks (Pembrokeshire).

SSCE Cymru

In 2014 a Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) programme was developed called Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru. The programme was initially funded through the MoD Education Support Fund (ESF) however this moved to Welsh Government funding in 2019. The aim of the programme is to work with children and young people, schools, Government, local authorities, the Armed Forces, education professionals, and support organisations to raise awareness and understandings of children of Armed Forces Personnel (SSCE Cymru, 2021). In 2020 SSCE Cymru recruited four Regional Schools Liaison Officers (RLSO) for a two-year project. These RSLOs are based across Wales, hosted by local authorities, and are responsible for delivering activities in collaboration with SSCE network members. The aim of this is for the RSLOs to closely support Service children across Wales and ensure that the schools understand the needs and experiences of the children and can support them where necessary. A SSCE representative explained that *'there has been a huge increase in engagement since the implementation of the RSLOs'* with both the SSCE website and social media sites getting more attention than ever before. One RSLO explained how their role was to *'help teachers think outside the box and question things that teachers automatically do'*. By having someone on the ground to liaise with schools and Service children SSCE Cymru has found that there has been real impact in the relationships that are being developed between the schools and the RSLOs.

Mobility

Within Wales stakeholders suggested that they felt that there was a sense of stability with regards to the mobility of Armed Forces personnel and families. A MoD Education Officer representative explained how in Wales

> *'families don't move around that much so there isn't that area of mobility that people assume service families are going through, it's a bit more stable'.*

An interesting perspective was added by one school who completed the Welsh survey who stated that

'Our service children are in Year 2 and Reception. They have never been to another school. They have never lived outside of our community. We are a Welsh medium school and therefore we do not have many pupils enrolling for short periods of time'.

There was a common thread throughout this piece of research that whilst Service families moved into Wales, once they were there they often stayed for a prolonged period of time. Many Stakeholders suggested that if Service families knew that they were going to be stationed in Wales for a significant period of time they would be more accepting of sending their children to a Welsh medium school.

Stakeholders did acknowledge however that the mobility of the Service children varies significantly depending on which arm of the Armed Forces their parent(s) belong to. In Wales armed forces tend to focus around the Army and RAF. Stakeholders suggested that for those associated to the Army there is not a significant amount of mobility, however there are more frequent levels of deployment, whereas in the RAF the personnel are on deployment less frequently but are often required to move around more frequently due to training. It is therefore important to take these differences into consideration when discussing the needs of a Service child as the armed force that they are attributed to can often affect how they experience their schooling and home lives.

Welsh Language

As part of Wales' national mission for educational reform there are Welsh Government objectives of 'building resilient communities, culture and language, and promoting and protecting Wales' place in the world' (Welsh Government, 2017) with the aim of one million people speaking Welsh by 2050. Since 1999 Welsh has been compulsory for all children to learn in Key Stages 1-4, consequently, regardless of the stage in which a child is joining a school in Wales, they are required to learn Welsh.

As a result of this policy implementation, one of the most notable concerns that was mentioned amongst Wales stakeholders was the potential issues that the Welsh language

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raises for Service children, particularly with regards to Service children moving into Wales. A Regional Schools Liaison Officer (RSLO) explained that until they entered this newly developed role they did not realise the extent to which the Welsh language played in schools

'until having conversations you take for granted how much Welsh is embedded into the curriculum, even when it comes to taking the register'.

Consequently, the work of the RSLOs has developed with teachers to question what they do and help them understand the difficulties that may be experienced by Service children moving into Wales and being faced with learning a new language and what support can be put in place for the children. An Armed Forces Liaison Officer explained how they had encouraged schools to apply for funding for help with Welsh language support for the children but said that in reality

'you need to think of the parents in terms of being a military parent, if I was dipping into Wales for a couple of years and I knew I'd be moving out I wouldn't be bothered about learning Welsh'.

Whilst stakeholders suggested that the Welsh language should not necessarily be a concern as there is support available for students, it was also described as a barrier with 'a lot of red tape' especially in terms of written communication as that is expected to be offered in both Welsh and English. It was suggested however that the language concern is a bigger issue in some parts of the country than others due to a higher presence of Welsh Medium schools. One RSLO explained how there was

'a genuine concern about Welsh speaking schools, predominantly in North Wales'.

One of the ways around this, which was spoken about by one the Armed Forces liaison officer as well as an RSLO is through Armed Forces families sending their children to independent schools where there is not a Welsh language requirement. The RSLO explained that 'for Armed Forces families that are stationed in the North and who don't want their children to learn Welsh there are a lot of boarding schools in North Wales'. This was supported by the Armed Forces liaison officer who stated that '*the way to get around your child not having to learn and speak Welsh is to put them into the private schools'*. This is made feasible through MoD grants for private education such as the North Wales Day School Allowance whereby if you live in either Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, the Isle of Anglesey or Flintshire, and serve in either

RAF Valley, the Joint Services Mountain Training Centre or the Joint Services Mountain Training Wing, you can receive up to £5,950 per term for your child's private education (MoD, 2021).

One Secondary school MoD Co-ordinator explained however that there is support offered to Service children who have joined mainstream schools from outside of Wales, they stated that

'if they haven't done Welsh before we will arrange for them to have some introduction to it…but if they're doing GCSEs and in year 11 they can't start another subject then, it's not fair'.

This was supported by a comment within the survey in which a staff member explained that

'though it is rare, if a student hasn't studied Welsh and will be moving on again, or arrives late in KS4 they don't have to do Welsh'.

A Service child (age 12) at one school, who had recently joined the school having spent most of her life abroad, explained that she has

'lessons from Mrs J (Welsh teacher) and they've given me a dictionary to help me which I carry around with me. I've been learning French for most of my life and before I moved I was learning Spanish but Welsh is really hard!'

One Primary school in North Wales however had recently transitioned to become a bilingual school to fall in line with other schools in the local area. The Head Teacher explained how over 90% of the students are from local families and so it was important to meet those Welsh language needs. The Head Teacher stated that

'if [the parents] really don't want their children to learn Welsh then there are other options available elsewhere'.

By this the implication was that the families can send their children to the private schools with the funding that is available.

As such, there was awareness that in certain areas of Wales, particularly the north, a toolkit would be more welcomed if it was written in Welsh. Having said this, a SSCE representative explained that whilst a Toolkit in the Welsh language would be appreciated, in reality, 'most schools would still be happy to engage and use an English Toolkit'.

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Celebrating the Service child

Amongst the interviews with many of the Stakeholders in Wales was the feeling around the importance of focussing the narrative around celebration and inclusion rather that the challenges that Service children face. The Head Teacher at one school explained the importance of

> *'teaching diversity and celebrating everyone…it is trying not to separate because it is very easy to fall into a trap of Service children being different but we have children who's dads work away on lorries all week…it's hard on everyone'.*

Instead, Stakeholders expressed their desire to ensure that Service children were celebrated for the experiences they had had such as living in different countries and amongst different cultures and how these experiences could be brought into the classroom and other students. A MoD Education Officer explained how many Service children have

> *'lived in more places than I've lived, they've done amazing things – what an asset to any school or employer or university because they've got an amazing experience. Some have seen the 7 types of penguins in the Falklands, and seen dolphins and been into the jungle in Brunei for their residentials…you've got to embrace this!'*

By engaging the Service children in a way that builds on the experiences they have had and the world they have seen it is a way of making the children feel involved and included in their new school environment and can act as a way of developing new friendships.

The MoD representative continued this by explaining how they had spoken to pupils in one school and asked them about the problems of being a Service child and '*they say there aren't any…dad goes away during the week and comes back at the weekend*'. When asked what the positives were of being a Service child they responded, '*we get discount at JD sports!*'. Whilst this is not to say that Service children do not experience challenges, as we will see in the next section, but it is important for schools to see that as having assets that they can bring to the school and classroom and they have the resources to be able to teach other children about their experiences.

Wellbeing in the Welsh Curriculum

As part of the new Curriculum for Wales 2022 there sees the introduction of Health and Wellbeing as an area of learning. The fundamental components of this area of learning are

physical and mental health, emotional and social wellbeing. Multiple Stakeholders when interviewed for this project noted how the change in the curriculum to adopt the new areas of learning would be a good opportunity for the Thriving Lives Toolkit to complement the new curriculum. An Estyn representative explained how '*the big focus is of wellbeing in the new curriculum so it would be good if we could get the toolkit involved in this way if we could*'. This was further supported by an RSLO who stated that '*references to areas of learning would be really helpful*'. At one secondary school the Service children were also encouraged to attend wellbeing lessons with other Service children in the school where they are able to '*discuss their feelings*', with one Service child (Yr 8) explaining '*if there wasn't someone to talk to I would feel very alone because I wouldn't know anyone else who had parents in the MoD*'. This statement demonstrates the importance of teachers being aware of the Service children in their school and classroom and the emotional issues that they may be experiencing. By having access to names of Service children and the details of parent's deployment teachers and pastoral staff can be on alert as to the possible changes in behaviours of a child. Within this particular school the children were supported in the wellbeing lessons by pastoral staff as well as learning support assistants (LSAs) who are employed through the MoD Education Support Fund (ESF).

Support for Service children with additional needs

One of the biggest concerns expressed by some of the Welsh Stakeholders in this piece of research was regarding Service children with additional learning needs (ALN). A Stakeholder from the MoD Children's Education Advisory Service was all too aware of the struggles experienced by families of Service children with additional learning needs or special educational needs and disabilities. One of the key issues is related to technical vocabulary and terminology which is used between administrations for the same thing such as ALN in Wales, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England and Additional Support Needs (ASN) in Scotland. The MoD SEND Education Officer explained how '*each and every local authority has their own [vocabulary] and then each and every school within each and every local authority creates their own [vocabulary]*'. Stating how

'*you've got your statement in Wales, soon to be individual development plan, you've got your EHCP in England, was the statement, still is the statement in NI, co-ordinated support plan in*

Scotland…the differences each of those plans can mean in practical terms to a child is massive'.

Added on to this, not only does vocabulary cause issues but

'It takes so much time, effort and money to build a case for students to get support and then when they move schools to a different nation or country they have to do it all again and may not end up with the same support as the legal status of that statutory plan disappears when moving between England, Scotland and Wales' (MoD Education Officer).

This is important to note as schools need to be aware that if a Service child is joining their school from another country they may have had support in their previous school that is no longer available in their new school. Added to this, the parents of the Service child may not be aware of how the educational support plans vary across countries, and the fact that there is support available from the MoD to help children with additional learning needs and their families when transitioning. An interesting point that did arise from interviews with the representatives from the Families Federations was that it was not just across nations that issues arose when moving schools as a Service child but in fact the same issues were present when moving from county to county. In instances such as this the Thriving Lives Toolkit should be used to reinforce the importance of support for the moving children and ensure that there is not an assumption that schools will have the same support structures and procedures in place.

Funding and data collection

In England schools have access to Service Pupil Premium (SPP), whereby mainstream schools with Service children, receive additional funding to provide additional support to the Service children. As part of this, schools report on how they use the funding and how the Service children benefit from the money, which consequently allows for Service children in England to be tracked. Schools in Wales and Scotland do not receive Service Pupil Premium and therefore have no tendency to track their Service children. A MoD Education Officer described this as being a 'weakness in Wales' as 'if someone comes into school and we've not been told and no one has asked their Service child status, if any, then no transition process will take place'. It is argued that this is vital in ensuring that Service children transitioning in and out of Wales have

the support that is available to them and the schools that they are moving to and from are aware of their Service child status.

One of the issues in tracking Service children in Wales is the confusion over the multiple definitions of the term. For example, one RSLO explained how

'previously the Welsh Gov definition of a Service child was a child who has current serving armed forces parents, parents who are a full time reservist and then parents who left the armed forces up to 6 years ago but this changed recently to up to 2 years of being a veteran, which is a real shame, we don't know why they did it'.

They further explained how it 'would be stupid for us to only go with the Welsh government definition' because it alienates so many Service children who could benefit from the support but who would otherwise miss out. And this therefore makes it harder to track Service children if the definition of a Service child varies from MoD to SSCE to Welsh Gov.

One way in which the RSLO explained that SSCE Cymru were trying to start tracking Service children was through the push to put 'Service children' on the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) which is a data collection process for all maintained schools and nurseries in Wales. PLASC requires mainstream schools to report on all pupils on roll, including the number of students eligible for free school meals, pupil postcodes, English as an additional language status and any special needs, all data which is used to finalise funding allocation for each school. By petitioning for the Welsh Government to implement a 'Service child' data request in the PLASC it would allow for government, organisations and schools to see numbers of Service children and where they go to school and allocate support accordingly.

Whilst SSP is not available in Wales, one secondary school noted how their school had received MoD Education Support Funding which had been spent specifically on MoD Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to help support the Service children both in and out of the classroom. This funding however was temporary and meant that the LSAs were generally funded sporadically meaning that they had wavered between having 2-3 LSAs at any one time. Like the SPP however schools do have to report on this funding to the MoD. An issue with funding like this

is that it is limited and it has to be applied for meaning that only some schools are successful in receiving the funds to be able to support their Service children in this way.

Scotland

Education in Scotland is quite different in many respects to that of the other nations. The Education System in Scotland is overseen by Education Scotland which is a Scottish Government executive agency. Its mission is to "support quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all age" (https://education.gov.scot). Education Scotland uses a framework called Curriculum for Excellence which is divided into two phases: the broad general education and the senior phase. The broad general education begins in early learning and childcare and continues to the end of S3 (the third year of secondary school, when students are approximately age 15). Students transition into S1 (the first year of Secondary school) around the age of 12 after completing seven years of primary school (starting around age 5). The Curriculum for Excellence aims to develop the knowledge, skills, attributes and capabilities of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

Apart from differences in the age at which formal primary and secondary school begins, and differences in curriculum, school leadership and direction in schools in Scotland is less driven by national government and more influenced by local authority factors than in England.

In Scotland there is one RAF base, RAF Lossiemouth (Moray) (RAF, 2020) and one Naval base, HMNB Clyde (Argyll and Bute) (Royal Navy, 2020). There are also a significant number of Army Barracks in Scotland including: Cameron Barracks and Fort George (Inverness-shire), Dreghorn Barracks and Redford Barracks (Edinburgh), Walcheren Barracks (Glasgow), Forthside Barracks (Stirlingshire), Glencorse Barracks (Midlothian), Gordon Barracks (Aberdeenshire) and Kinloss Barracks (Moray).

Armed Forces Champions

Armed Forces Champions have been developed by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in the five regions of Scotland which is looking to expand into all local authorities. Skills Development Scotland is the national skills body for Scotland. Their remit includes feeding into Scotland's sustainable economic growth which it does by supporting people and businesses to develop and apply their skills. A key component of this is that they 'support individuals to build their career management, work-based and employability skills, throughout their career journey, from school, into further learning opportunities and employment' (SDS, 2021). SDS have developed Armed Forces and Veterans Champions roles - these champions also act as links between the forces and school career advisers whereby a forces unit can communicate with the school to inform them of any deployment taking place and can ensure that the school is able to support and monitor the Service children.

Governance and Quality Assurance

A key difference in Scotland is that school's performance is monitored via self-evaluation using the How Good Is My School (HGIOS) tool (now in its fourth iteration). Schools in Scotland do not have Governing bodies and are not evaluated by Ofsted. In fact, the ethos of Scottish Education is more on collaboration and self-improvement than might be the case in England. Stemming from this, an important piece of consistent feedback was around using the Toolkit to engage with schools - and seeking to use it to generate additional resources / good practice case studies etc that could be produced / co-produced with schools themselves. This is more in line with the ethos of Scottish Education which has a strong focus on collaboration.

Importance of terminology

A key difference when discussing Service children in Scotland is that the term 'Service children' does not exist, instead 'Armed forces children' is used by Government, stakeholder organisations, schools and their staff. For the sake of coherence however, this report uses the term 'Service children' in the discussion of themes, even though the participants working in Scotland did not use this term in their interviews or focus groups (quotes are left unamended).

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Getting lost in the system

In Scotland, concern was raised around Service children getting lost in the system where there were only small numbers of them in schools. Stakeholders in Scotland explained that a significant concern regarding support for Service children was when they were moving to schools where there were small numbers of Service children attending the schools in question. A teacher at one primary school explained how

'it is difficult for Armed Forces kids in schools where there are very small numbers. It is really special for them to have that shared experience and I know that the schools with a small number of Armed Forces kids can find those connections through other means but for it to be part of the school is important'.

The issue here is that the Service children are potentially not receiving the support that they need and do not have a dedicated member of the school staff, be it teaching or pastoral, who can offer emotional or wellbeing support to the child(ren).

Age gaps and year groups

In Scotland there is a six-month bracket where there is a mismatch in the age of school children compared to the rest of the UK. Whilst children in England and Wales begin school at the age of four, entering into a foundation year, children in Scotland begin primary school at age 5 (or four if their fifth birthday occurs before the end of February in the following year). They enter into Primary 1 and there are seven years in Primary school in Scotland, meaning transition to Secondary school typically takes place when the child is 12 years old. These age differentials and accompany differences in the structure of school years can have significant consequences for maturity levels and curriculum knowledge when transitioning between different nations. A military transitions policy officer from the Scottish Government explained how

'in pre-school and primary age groups this gap may be quite marked, and accentuated by differences in the curriculum'.

This was supported by a primary school teacher who stated that

'there are significant gaps in knowledge and learning experiences because of the age gaps in the curriculum when moving across the borders into Scotland...this also affects what class a child is in and there are often concerns by parents that their child is being 'held back''.

This finding demonstrates the importance of schools in all nations understanding how the differences between the Scottish school system and those in England and Wales might create transition issues for students moving in or out of Scotland, and the importance of acknowledging that younger children may need additional support during their initial few months.

Funding and data collection

Like Wales, Scotland does not receive Service Pupil Premium (SPP). Scottish Stakeholders however did explain that there is funding available through the MoD Education Support Fund which some schools had been successful in securing – this could be used for learning activities, trips and resources. There is also funding available from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund. A National Transitions Officer explained how a Head Teachers Forum has been developed '*which allows sharing of practice so that schools who have lower numbers of forces pupils and/or less funding can learn from others.*' There was a feeling by Stakeholders in the research that the lack of a SPP affected schools in terms of what they felt they were capable of doing and support in accessing and supporting funding for Service children is essential. This was apparent in schools with both small and large numbers of Service children on roll.

Again, like Wales, there is no formal way to track Service children in Scotland because this data is not actively gathered. A representative from the Royal Caledonian Education Trust (RCET), now Forces Children Scotland, stated that '*tracking is an ongoing issue in Scotland. Some schools do it better than others*'. It was highlighted by several Scottish Stakeholders that, whilst there is a 'flag' for 'Armed forces' children on the school management systems in Scotland (CMIS) where schools can highlight the children and the service in which their parent(s) belong, its use is not mandatory.

The military transitions policy officer from the Scottish Government explained how

'*we have thought about gathering data within the MoD but their system makes this difficult – they know the numbers of children but not where they may be going to school. Plus, the growth in weekly commuting of forces personnel means some may be cross-border commuting meaning that they may be based in Scotland but have children at school in England.*'

The effectiveness of this 'flag' however is reliant on the expectation that Service families and children are either proactive in declaring their status and/or they wish to be identified. During the research both Service children and school staff noted that not all Service children preferred to have their Service child status known either to the school or to other children within the school. This finding comes from the young people not wishing to be treated differently to their friends or being taken out of class for activities and therefore being seen as 'different' or 'special.'

Cultural differences

Some Stakeholders in Scotland expressed awareness that support was needed for Service families where significant cultural differences might be experienced. Stakeholders had come across some Service families who had moved to the UK and were not aware of the laws regarding leaving children at home alone or levels of disciplining children. An MoD SEND Officer explained how *'you have to let your families know about the implications of their actions'*. One Head Teacher during a Scottish webinar explained how they had come across such issues and had consequently *'developed a new handbook for parents of new Service children to the school where there is a specific section dedicated to policies and practices regarding these concerns'*.

Experiences of Service children

The research included several focus groups with Service children across Wales and Scotland, all had very varied backgrounds. Some children had never had to move, others had moved many times. Some had suffered traumatic experiences including parental loss whilst others had experienced only limited disruption. Nonetheless there was significant commonality in their views and thoughts, regardless of which country they lived in.

Effective 'buddy' system

A buddy system was experienced by Service children in both Scotland and Wales by those students who had moved schools. Many students explained how they were given a 'buddy' for their first few days to act as a friendly face and show them around the school. One high school student (age 13) explained how

'it was really nice to have someone there before you got your own friends, it is a nice way to acclimatise'.

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A primary school child (age 10) said that

> *'it was hard moving here because I lived in England all my life but my teachers were really patient and on my first day they buddied me up to help me make friends pretty quickly'.*

For these students their 'buddies' were not necessarily from an Armed Forces family however, this was something that the Service children thought would be beneficial. Having somebody within those key first few days in a new school for these Service children would enable them to develop a relationship with somebody like themselves who understands what they are going through as a new student in a new school with no friendship group.

Losing and making friends

Unsurprisingly nearly all the Service children we spoke to were vocal about the difficulties and struggles they faced in leaving friendship groups they had formed in their previous schools and having to move somewhere, often in a new country, and make a new set of friends, not knowing how long they would be at that school for. One secondary school Service child (age 14) explained how

> *'I moved schools in primary school and found it really hard. Going in at a young age and with no friends…I had to join school clubs to meet new friends'.*

Another secondary school student (age 12) who had recently moved to the UK from Belgium explained how she did not want to move schools because she had so many friends in Belgium, where she had spent most of her life, and stated that

> *'sometimes I worry if there is any point in making new friends if you could be moving school again in a year'.*

The same student explained that they thought it was difficult as a 'military kid' to make new friends as 'you don't know if they're going to stick with you' if and when you move again. This was supported by a primary school Service child (age 8) who explained

> *'it feels like when you find a new friend you've got to say goodbye to them again'.*

Despite this, the children also saw positives in amongst the negatives of being transient. The Service children expressed how they were able to use technology to keep in touch with friends, which not so long ago would not have been an option at all. One secondary school student (age 12) explained how

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'moving has actually been really easy for me because I've been doing it since I was born, but sometimes it's been quite hard when I've lived somewhere for a while and I find leaving my friends difficult…but it's better now I've got a phone and stuff because I can keep in touch with everyone'.

Added to this, some students saw moving schools frequently gave them a new skill of being able to make new friendship groups easily. A primary school student (age 9) stated that *'I am happy because you do get to make new friends'* and a secondary school Service child (age 12) explained how *'it really helps your socialising skills, you can make friends on holiday*!'.

Service children who did attend a school where there was a significant presence of Service children, and those who had in the past, expressed how having other Service children around them helped them if, or when, they needed support. One primary school child stated that *'having lots of other military kids in school is helpful because their lives are a bit like ours'*.

Effect of deployment

The Service children all noted the difficulties that arise when their parent(s) go on deployment. One secondary school child (age 13) explained that she had lived with her grandparents for two weeks while her mum was away dealing with her step-dad who had had a military related accident. Whilst she said she *'talked to friends and grandparents who gave a lot of support'* she noted that her mum '*advised her not to speak to school-teachers about it'*. Another secondary school child (age 14) explained that their parent going away '*just felt like a normal part of life*', and whilst it was '*always nice to have them home and safe it is never the same when they come back…you grow up more quickly because you have to'*. Another Service child (age 16), now in secondary school, had lived with friends for several weeks in primary school whilst their parent was away. She explained that

'I really missed her, I cried a lot and wanted her to tuck me in at night. I missed hugging her…its really sad when you can't have the support of a parent, especially when they're single parents'.

Something that the Service children found helpful whilst their parent(s) were on deployment is the support available from the MoD. This typically takes the form of putting on clubs and activities for all the children from the unit that is on deployment. Through these activities the

children have the opportunity to speak to others who maybe do not attend their school, they can write letters to their parent(s) and make memory boxes which could be opened on their parents return. This helps give the children a sense of community and support which could be accessed as and when they needed it.

Emotional needs of students

It was important to many of the Service children in the research that there was somebody within their school who they trusted and who they could go to when they needed to talk. Both schools in Wales and Scotland explained that they used MoD funding, generally the ESF, to employ support teachers who '*focus on wellbeing, resilience and emotional support*' (Armed Forces Support Teacher) for the Service children. This was often available in the form of group, one-to-one and drop-in sessions for the Service children. In one secondary school the students had access to Wellbeing Support, which as well as having an open-door policy also had weekly group sessions the Service children attended together. One Service child (age 15) stated that

'there's a lot of people I can talk to. We have a wellbeing teacher we can ask questions and checks up on us and they give us activity sheets to discuss our feelings'.

However, this support was generally only available in schools which had managed to secure funding to provide these services and often only took place in schools which had larger numbers of Service children and the children were on a wellbeing radar. A Service child (12) who had moved schools frequently explained how they and their sibling had attended one school where 'we were the only ones [from a forces family] and there was no support in the school and no one to help us'. It is important to acknowledge the need for support to be available to the Service children to enable them to see school as a safe environment where they can speak to somebody about their emotions or concerns. Whilst some schools are able to provide staff specifically for this role, other schools cannot, and this can have a knock-on effect on the behaviours of the Service children if they do not feel supported.

Strengths of the Toolkit

From the findings above it is clear that Service children report the same experiences as those described by children in the 2019 English based research:

1. Issues around making, maintaining and losing friendships
2. Issues around parents and their deployment cycles

3. Issues of wellbeing and engagement as a consequence.

Staff in schools likewise reported similar experiences:

1. Lack of awareness across all staff about the number/identity of Service children and what advantages and disadvantages this status may proffer these children.

2. The importance of engaging and communicating with parents regarding deployment cycles as these impact on student's engagement and behaviour.

3. Lack of resources (predominantly time but also financial) to offer the level of support they would like to.

4. Awareness, understanding and support was typically greater in schools who had higher numbers of Service children on roll.

The Toolkit was perceived as a valuable resource in thinking about how to develop provision that dealt with the issues raised by Service children and by staff, namely issues around a lack of awareness and understanding in school staff, transition, deployment, well-being, parental engagement. Whilst the contexts across Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are unique, the transition and mobility experiences of young people are universal and as such these national contextual differences were not relevant to the Toolkit's ability to support Service children in any context.

Recommendations

These focus on what amendments or developments might be made to the Thriving Lives Toolkit and accompanying resources. Whilst many participants in the research had not yet worked with the Thriving Lives Toolkit we encouraged them to take a look at the Toolkit prior to their interviews so that they could provide feedback on their thoughts of the existing Toolkit. Overall, the Toolkit received really positive reviews and feedback with comments such as '*I really liked the examples throughout the toolkit*' and *it is really good that the toolkit covers issues that are relevant for Service children, but also other children*'. Despite this, there were a few recommendations that came out through conversations, we classify these as 'needs' - amends that are required to enhance relevance nationally – and 'ideals' - aspects which would enhance the impact of using the Toolkit.

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Needs:

1. Terminology – terminology within the toolkit must avoid being Anglocentric. It includes terms such as 'governor' which is not applicable in Scotland and needs to acknowledge that in Scotland the terms Service Child or Service Family are not used (rather they use the term Armed Forces). This might involve making clear that these differences are recognised and understood but that sticking with one Toolkit and universal terminology makes the Toolkit more coherent and simpler. The term Military Family appeared to be more universally accepted.

2. A second acknowledgment that needs to be made is the difference in governance in Scotland (where there are no governing bodies for schools) and in Scotland and Wales where Pupil Premium funding for Service children does not exist. This might mean making language more generic and referencing generic funding opportunities and school quality assurance processes such as monitoring, evaluation and improvement. Alternatively, the Toolkit could include reference to parent councils and HGIOS4 (How Good Is Your School 4 which is a self-evaluation tool used by schools in Scotland to underpin school improvement) as well as Governors.

Ideals:

1. Making sure that schools in Scotland can see how the Toolkit enhances their evaluation in HGIOS 4 and its performance and self-improvement criteria. There has been some mapping of this completed already – it is recommended that this is continued and communicated to schools in Scotland.

2. Develop the Toolkit in a way that can be adapted to work alongside Wales' new wellbeing framework as part of the curriculum.

3. Consider the fact that the Toolkit, whilst developed for a specific group of people, has wider applicability. This might mean including materials or resources on how other people might use the Toolkit.

4. The Toolkit includes some examples of good practice and there are resources from the SCiP Alliance that are available for schools to use. Schools have fed back that such resources are most easily used and are most effective when they are short, concise and

are presented in accessible, bitesize amounts of information. This finding corroborates the findings from the original research in England.

5. Recognise that each school is unique in its context so resources are likely to be more effective for a wider range of schools when they offer examples of how practice can be adapted to suit different contexts. This might mean providing brief examples of aspects which could be delivered in different ways.

Possible Further Developments for the toolkit
Maximising utility of the Toolkit

- Wording would be customised for each country – this option would obviously address the variations in each country which could have good practice examples dedicated to the context. However, it would undermine the concept of a UK toolkit as well as the overwhelming similarities in experiences that Service children share.

- The toolkit to have generic wording which is acceptable to all - each country could have bespoke customised guidance notes which support the embedding in each country. A variety of good practice examples from across the UK can be shared. An example of this has been the Family First Standard. This is likely to offer all participants with dedicated resources.

Examples of other standards addressing multiple needs across the UK include:

- Lexcel (the Law Society's standard) have one standard for England and Wales (because England and Wales have the same laws) and an International Standard – it means Scotland is assessed against the International standard as their laws/legal systems are different from England and Wales

- Families First (a standard for Family Information Services) have specific elements relevant only to a specific devolved nation – in their case, there is a specific element for Wales that services in other nations do not need to achieve (and aspects of the rest of the Standard that Welsh services do not need to achieve)

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- Standards such as the matrix standard for information, advice and guidance are quite generic and need a lot of interpretation to local context (and in effect that is the same for the International version of Lexcel) with the development of different 'guidance' documents depending upon context.

Review of Thriving Lives Toolkit

Below is a review of the toolkit identifying potential issues which may need to be addressed. As can be seem these are predominantly few and generally reflect the varying educational contexts within Wales and Scotland

Principle	Issue	Recommendation
1. Our approach is clear	Reference to dedicated funding?	Retain the term 'dedicated funding' as this is generic and could apply to a range of funding sources
	Governing body reference "Governing body minutes evidencing challenge around Service children's academic progress, achievement and wellbeing"	Change to "School oversight arrangements to be made aware of Service children's academic progress, achievement and well being.
	"To what extent do your admissions policies take account of Service families' frequent, mid-term and short notice moves?"	Reword "To what extent do school admissions arrangements take account of Service families' frequent, mid-term and short notice moves?"
2. Wellbeing is supported		
3. Achievement is maximised		
4.Transition is effective	Identifying Service children through admission forms	Suggest change to

		Identifying Service children through admission processes
	Common Transfer File (CTF)	Alternatives in Scotland/NI Remove this statement
	4.4 "To what extent do you work with a Service children's previous or future schools to transfer records and find out about learning, wellbeing, achievements, interests, skills and their family context?"	The wording is generic and should be acceptable.
5. Children are heard	Specific arrangements for Service child representation on school council or in ambassador or young governor scheme	" Specific arrangements should be made in all student representation bodies to ensure Service children's voices are heard"

6. Parents are engaged

7. Staff are well-informed	University outreach	We agreed this is ok
	7.3 To what extent do you ensure that all staff and governing body members access high quality training about supporting Service children?"	Suggested wording "To what extent do you ensure that all staff and those with responsibility for school oversight i.e., Governing body/Parent Council have access to high

		quality training about supporting Service children?"

Other revisions

- The quotes may need to be amended to be more reflective of all countries within the UK. We have provided a number of quotes which will help to offer a wider range of comments from across the UK.