

Service Children's Progression Alliance Research Plan 2017

Purpose

Theme 2 within the Alliance's strategic plan relates to research and aims to:

Theme 2: Lead the prioritisation, design and delivery of research to improve knowledge, understanding, tracking and evidence that will support the development of effective policy and practice.

Three sub-aims address, respectively, the need to: set up the infrastructure for a research hub; identify and answer key research questions; and facilitate two-way engagement with policy and practice users of research, so that the outputs achieve the desired impact and change.

Aim 2.1: Create effective inter-disciplinary research 'hub' to facilitate research collaboration focused on the Alliance's mission

Aim 2.2: Identify and answer key research questions to enable a demonstrable impact on the further and higher education access, success and progression of service children.

Aim 2.3: Secure productive two-way engagement with policy and practice stakeholders including government, education and third sector organisations, to enable the meaningful application of robust research to policy and practice.

This research plan speaks directly to these aims. It sets out the key research questions to be addressed, major research activities and indicators of success. In addition to addressing the core themes of the Alliance, the plan is constructed with financial sustainability in mind. This is achieved through taking a graduated approach to research whereby research outputs are intended to form the basis of larger research opportunities with appeal to progressively wider ranges of potential funding bodies including charitable organisations, central and local government, and traditional funders of academic research. Each kind of organisation will have particular priorities and objectives; a graduated approach will help to ensure that synergies are identified and robust, persuasive applications made.

Framework

In order to address the overall mission of the Alliance it is imperative that research supports us to:

- **Understand** the experiences and outcomes of service children fully and the reasons for them;
- **Identify** the most effective approaches to improve outcomes;
- **Translate** this knowledge into sustainable activity everywhere where it is needed.

Three priority dimensions are active in mediating outcomes for service children: the service children themselves in the context of their family (**individual**); the teachers and other practitioners who support them (**professionals**); and the boundaries and opportunities within which they develop and progress (**system**).

The three priority dimensions are argued to inter-relate. Therefore, while individual research activities might address these dimensions as discrete entities, the overall narrative seeks to recognise the interaction between these dimensions of young people's lives.

Headline Research Questions

The following table outlines the key research questions that underpin the Alliance's planned research activities:

Dimension	Overarching question	Understanding the situation	Impact upon practice and outcomes
Individual	Are young people from military service families achieving their educational potential?	What distinguishes the educational experiences of young people from military service families from other groups (including those under-represented in higher education)?	How can the experiences of young people from military service families inform the support they are offered in educational decision-making?
Professional	What is the relationship between education professionals and young people from military service families?	How do education professionals view and understand young people from military service families?	How can education professionals better understand and respond to young people from military service families?
System	What is the systemic environment for the education of young people from military service families and the professionals supporting them?	How do different elements of the educational environment link together with respect to young people from military service families and the professionals supporting them?	What opportunities exist for policymakers to strengthen the response of education policy to the commitments of the Armed Forces Covenant?

One additional theme for the research plan, which is fundamental to addressing the others, is **data**. Knowledge of and access to appropriate data is key to answering the research questions. A series of questions in this theme help to define the scope of interest and what is required to answer the questions within these boundaries.

Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Define the target group – exactly who is the subject of our interest and aims? ▪ Define success – exactly what is considered a successful outcome? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ National progression rates improve (whole cohort level) ○ Individuals make better choices (best for them) ○ Individuals fulfill their education and personal potential ▪ The perspectives of the individual, the parent, the school, the government may differ ▪ What data are needed? ▪ What data are available (inaccessible, accessible with permission, open access)?
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Variables and Factors

The following list of known variable and factors have been identified through an initial discussion intended to provide a starting point for forming a research activity plan. They reflect initial thoughts at the start of the Alliance's work, and hence may be superseded as research findings emerge.

Individual (family)

- Family mobility: 1) all set in one area; 2) child moves about/abroad; 3) child boards (only 5%, but ½ in HE); 4) some family stay while serving family member is mobile.
- Transitional phases: relate to age; how long parents in service; which service / regiment; rank/experience/role of parents; frequency and length of mobility.
- Differences based on type of service and housing implications.
- Residual effect of being a service child.
- Challenges: school integration: travellers now classified as minority group but service children not.
- Challenge: overseas service children in schools (MoD schools); other education provisions.
- Separation issues; year group when born.
- Impact of both parents serving (lone serving); is boarding the best option?
- Place/personal identity of mobile service children on education choices.
- International comparisons (issue as differences in tour lengths) – currently in States; PTS and diseffectiveness of parents and family on child?
- SEN of serving individual i.e. parent perspective, child perspective; Ed needs / health

Professional

- Fundamental provision is set within the state education structure.
- Professional practice is governed through statute and professional standards.

System

- Student funding, especially intra-national (between the UK nations, for example)
- The impact of mobility on potential (transfer between schools)
- Regional variance (including attainment at GCSE)
- The significance to outcomes of core provision versus targeted interventions

Implementation: a graduated approach to research

The question of the educational progression of young people from military service families is relatively new and under-researched. Although the research proposed here relates closely to research in similar fields, a key part of the role of the SCiP Alliance is to establish educational progression as a key area of research in the context of young people from military service families. It is therefore proposed that a graduated approach to research is necessary in order to:

1. Create a robust and credible base of knowledge;
2. Build the reputation of the SCiP Alliance in the eyes of potential funding bodies;
3. Avoid a premature 'leap to action' without a sound understanding of the key issues; and
4. Ensure that recommendations for policy and practice are underpinned with evidence.

A graduated approach seeks to build a strong foundation and provide scaffolding for research of increasing sophistication, detail and scale:

- Foundation phase: identification of key facts and trends; refining of the research ‘problems’; initial pilot studies; literature reviews; gathering of basic statistical data; establishing distinctiveness of field of study.
- Depth phase: larger-scale research into key priority issues identified through pilot studies; expansion to include wider range of participants and settings; generalization of findings from individual cases.
- Implementation phase: evaluation of larger-scale practice-focused activities; translation of findings into recommendations for policy and practice.

The outcomes of each phase will provide a platform for the next, thus providing greater robustness and attractiveness to potential funding bodies. This will enable the Alliance to make progressively stronger cases for external funding. However, it is also possible that the depth and implementation phases could be pursued in parallel, given the potential already seen for research outcomes to inform practice.

The following table encapsulates the key objectives and priorities at each stage of the project. Progress has already been achieved towards the foundation phase, and emergent findings are indicating potentially fruitful routes for investigation at a depth level. Note that, because the foundation phase is intended to form the basis of the depth and implementation phases, detailed activity plans must necessarily emerge and evolve as the research progresses. Therefore, this table should not be regarded as exhaustive or definitive.

Phase	Objectives and priorities	Activities and outputs	Status
Foundation	Review the literature pertaining to the educational progression of young people from military service families.	Comprehensive literature review as part of initial report into progression. Initial report launched at SCiP Conference, July 2016 (audience of practitioners and researchers).	Complete Complete
Foundation	Understand the experiences of current higher education students from military service families.	Qualitative interviews reported as part of initial report into progression. Findings to be published in peer reviewed journals.	Complete In progress – timescale dependent on peer review process.

Phase	Objectives and priorities	Activities and outputs	Status
Foundation	Identify the size and characteristics of the population of young people from military service families.	Review of personnel records held by MoD; analysis by age, geographical location, service branch and rank of serving parent. Paper to be given at Army Families Federation Research Symposium, November 2017.	Complete In progress
Foundation	Explore the distinctiveness of educational decision-making by young people from military service families versus peers.	Qualitative interview research with Year 11 (aged 15-16) in school serving area with large concentration of serving military personnel. Publication of findings in peer-reviewed journal. Dissemination of findings to practitioners.	Fieldwork planned for Q4 2017. Project intended to be completed Q2 2018.
Depth	Further develop the data set pertaining to the educational experiences and attainment of young people from military service families.	Pursue further sources of data, e.g. PISA.	In progress. Further outcomes anticipated by end of Q4 2017.
Depth	Conduct larger-scale investigations into the distinctive experiences of young people from military service families.	Expand to include wider range of schools, young people etc. Publication of outcomes in peer-reviewed journal. Dissemination of findings to practitioners.	Not yet planned. Focus and timings to emerge following substantive completion of ongoing work.
Depth	Encourage critical thinking of future practitioners with respect to education and children from military service families.	Research-informed teaching in the form of a module being offered as part of the University of Winchester's MA Education programme.	In progress – offered for 2017-18 academic year.

Phase	Objectives and priorities	Activities and outputs	Status
Depth	Contextualise initial findings through evaluation of practice.	Bid submitted for the evaluation of a Children's Society project to improve the identification and support of young carers in armed forces families.	Planned to commence Q1 2018.
Implementation	Translation of research findings into practical activities for educational practitioners.	Evaluation of large-scale pilot of activities to support the educational decision-making of young people from military service families.	Not yet planned
Implementation	Translation of research findings into evidence-informed recommendations for policymakers.	To be identified.	Not yet planned

Outcomes

The following outcomes will define success as a result of our research activity over the three-year period of the MoD-funded set-up:

Outcomes	Outputs
Key policy-makers and other stakeholders are fully aware of the overall outcomes of service children and the priorities for action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual statistical analysis of outcomes against key indicators of success through the life-course. Timely summaries of research findings are published in easily accessible formats and include key actions for policy-makers, practitioners and other key influencers of outcomes.
SCiP Alliance contributes to the body of academic knowledge through publication in peer-reviewed journals and other academic forums.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outputs of research activities are published in appropriate peer-reviewed forums. SCiP research disseminated at significant academic conferences.
Key findings from research inform the development and evaluation of practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research-informed activities taking place in schools, colleges and/or higher education. Education professionals engaging in research, development and dissemination.
Funding is secured as appropriate to support research activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential funding organisations are identified and approached (including charitable organisations, central and local government, traditional research funders etc).