
Service Children's Progression
 **ALLIANCE**

Identifying shared priorities for action to ensure the educational success of Service children, and to better enable their progression through further and higher education into thriving adult lives and careers
A stakeholder consultation

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

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Executive Summary

July 2018

Setting the Scene

- The Service Children’s Progression Alliance (SCiP) commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with existing and potential stakeholders. The research objective was to inform the strategic priorities of the SCiP Alliance by identifying the services, activities and opportunities that would enable practitioners to further support the educational success and progression of Service children.
- The consultation was undertaken in three phases. An online questionnaire received 172 stakeholder responses, of which half were from practitioners currently working in a school; a quarter were from other education stakeholders (University, FE College, etc.); a quarter were from other stakeholder perspectives (e.g. charities, local authorities, MoD). Telephone interviews were subsequently undertaken with 30 stakeholders to explore their perspective in more depth. Finally, a workshop involving 32 participants explored the preliminary findings of the consultation to refine the key themes, and identify how the SCiP Alliance should respond.
- Three quarters of respondents overall (76%) either ‘completely’ or ‘mostly’ agreed that “Service children’s experiences can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups”. Those with more experience of working with Service children were more likely to agree with this statement. This may indicate that, for those unfamiliar with this cohort, there is a need for raising awareness about the experiences of Service children and how this may impact on their educational progression.
- The overall confidence expressed by practitioners from schools and non-education stakeholders in understanding the challenges and opportunities experienced by many Service children was high, although their confidence in supporting Service children to make informed choices about their future education and careers was somewhat lower. In contrast, university and college respondents were on average less confident in understanding the challenges and opportunities experienced by Service children, but more confident in supporting informed choices about future education and careers.
- Respondents from all sectors said that it was not always easy to identify appropriate resources to support their work with Service children. Existing resources were generally regarded as being targeted at younger age groups. Schools who engaged with existing programmes rated these highly, but still expressed a desire for additional resources.

Key Themes

- The consultation asked respondents to identify the main challenges that they, as a practitioner, face when supporting the educational attainment and progression of Service children. Many respondents focussed on their perceptions of the main challenges and opportunities experienced by Service children, as this provides the context for their work. Within these themes, there is clear acknowledgement of complexity. The identified themes are not necessarily experiences of all Service children, nor are they all unique to Service children. Some respondents used the term ‘risk factors’ to indicate areas where Service children are significantly more likely than other groups to have had a particular experience.
- A number of key experiences of Service children were identified:
 - **The central position of the military in the lives of Service families**
In many cases, a military career might be thought of as a ‘lifestyle’ rather than a ‘job’. This lifestyle underpins and shapes the experience of Service children in a way that is quite distinctive from the experience of the wider population. The significance of this in shaping the skills, expectations and aspirations of Service children might be easily overlooked, especially by those who are unfamiliar with the military and the lives of Service families.
 - **Mobility**
The most common challenge identified by school respondents was dealing with the impact of Service children moving schools much more frequently than other children, often at short notice. Patterns of mobility vary considerably both between and within branches. Mobility can be

disruptive to educational progression and reduce a young person's engagement with both formal and informal educational experiences. It can also enable a young person to develop resilience and other personal and social skills. The impacts of mobility may be both positive and negative, and often continue well beyond the point at which an individual has settled following relocation.

- **Family separation**

Temporary separation caused by a Service parent undertaking their duties can be a significant source of family stress, in particular where this is as a result of operational deployment. Periodic family separation was consistently identified as a key issue, and operational deployment as a key experience of Service children that has few parallels with that of other groups.
- **Transition to civilian life**

The point at which a parent leaves the armed forces is a significant point of transition for Service families. Given the central position of the military in the lives of Service families, this transition is not simply a change of employment but, potentially, a period of redefining identity.
- A number of key impacts for Service children were identified:
 - **Periodic family stress**

Not all Service children will experience stress in the same way, nor will everyone react to situations in the same way. Respondents were generally of the opinion that Service children were used to dealing with stress, often with very positive consequences. However, some expressed caution at assuming that 'coping' with a situation was sufficient, highlighting how this may mask some support needs.
 - **A transitory mindset**

Respondents suggested that frequent changes experienced by Service children can affect the way they respond to situations, engage with school and other activities, form relationships and think about their future. This can have both positive and negative impacts. Being adaptable and open to change can help to build resilience, and enable new friendships to be built quickly. However, expectations of future changes may mean that these friendships are somewhat superficial, and engagement with long-term planning may be reduced.
 - **'Service child' experiences shape aspirations**

It is perhaps a truism to state that aspirations are shaped by an individual's experience. However, many respondents expressed the view that, for Service children, their future aspirations are much more likely to be shaped by their specific experience as a 'Service child' than by other aspects of their experience. The majority of respondents felt that Service children on average have very high aspirations compared to their peers, but may not be fully informed: examples were given both of young people who had aspirations of a military career but lacked a complete understanding of how their education would enable them to achieve this, and of others who seemed unaware of the range of options available to them. In some cases, opportunities may be restricted by having experienced a disrupted curriculum, which may have resulted in good attainment but in a restricted range of subjects.

Views on the role of the SCiP Alliance

- Respondents identified the role of the SCiP Alliance as raising awareness of the progression needs of Service children, developing an evidence base of effective practice, and facilitating effective inter-agency working.
- Many respondents from all sectors highlighted the importance of hearing the voice of Service children. This included identifying Service child 'role models' who have pursued a range of careers and education pathways, to raise awareness of the diversity of options available to Service children.
- Ten 'areas for action' were identified across four themes. In some cases, these could be addressed by discrete projects. Others require wider systemic action that may be outside the direct control of the

members of the SCiP Alliance, but where collating and interpreting research findings and evidence of best practice may usefully inform the development of policy and professional guidance:

- **Tackling the practical and administrative challenges of mobility:**
 1. Ensuring transition between schools is as smooth as possible, through timely transfer of complete information, and provision of appropriate support;
 2. Avoiding incomplete and/ or repetitious coverage of the curriculum;
 3. Ensuring awareness and flexibility within FE/ HE application processes, particularly with regard to those Service children who have experienced moves at key points in their education.
- **Understanding the specific social and emotional demands that many Service children can face:**
 4. Increasing awareness of the social and emotional experiences of Service children, and of how these experiences may impact on their decision-making and progression;
 5. Recognising the additional and unique stresses Service families may face, and enabling all Service children to be resilient and recognise where they need support and/or information, and how to access that help.
- **Supporting Service children’s holistic wellbeing throughout and beyond periods of change:**
 6. Engaging Service children who have recently moved (and/or are likely to move again soon) with their current school environment, curriculum and peer group;
 7. Helping Service children to engage in planning for their futures, to think about and explore potential goals and routes that appeal to them, enabling them to fully recognise their skills and personal qualities, and acknowledge and work through barriers/ worries they have.
- **Engaging practitioners, families and stakeholders in building evidence and developing policy that will support Service children’s progression:**
 8. Building a comprehensive, high-quality evidence base to understand the holistic educational and career progression of Service children;
 9. Engaging service families, practitioners and stakeholders to understand and share effective, evidence-based support for the progression of Service children, which responds to administrative variations (e.g. between devolved nations) as well as the needs of the individual;
 10. Engaging families and Service children in thought and discussion about progression and the wide spectrum of options open to young people, including through exposure to role models from service families who have followed a range of routes and careers.

Conclusion

- The consultation identified that there is a significant need to develop the knowledge base regarding the educational and progression outcomes for Service children.
- There is a strong desire among stakeholders for a trusted source of good quality information on effective evidence-based practice.
- There is also a great deal of enthusiasm among stakeholders about the benefits that the SCiP Alliance could bring to their work, and a significant level of interest in making an active contribution to this work.

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The Service Children’s Progression (SCiP) Alliance is a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from military families.

This report has been produced for the SCiP Alliance, led by the **University of Winchester** and funded by the **Ministry of Defence (MoD)** in collaboration with **Service Children in State Schools (SCISS)**.