Service Children's Progression

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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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Acknowledgements:

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

Executive Summary

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.

- o **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.

- o **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:
  - o **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.

  - o **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.

  - o **'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.

Contents

Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Context

The Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP) is a UK-wide alliance, based at the University of Winchester, whose mission is to:

> *Champion the progression of the children of military personnel into and through further and higher education, so that they can make informed and confident transitions into thriving adult lives and careers.*

The SCiP Alliance commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with existing and potential stakeholders. The research objective was to inform the strategic priorities for 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 focused on two key questions:

- What are the main challenges practitioners face when supporting the educational attainment and progression of Service children?
- What would most help practitioners to enable Service children to achieve their full educational and career potential?

This report outlines the key findings from the consultation. A set of ten 'areas for action' are identified that, together, define the shared priorities of the different stakeholder perspectives. The report concludes by highlighting recommendations for the future development of the SCiP Alliance, based on the views of stakeholders.

1.2 Data Collection

Three methods of data collection were used for this consultation:

- **Online questionnaire:** a core questionnaire comprised of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions. Different stakeholder groups were asked additional questions specific to their professional setting. A pilot questionnaire was trialled with a small group of existing SCiP Alliance contacts.

  Following a few minor modifications, the questionnaire was promoted by the SCiP Alliance staff team and partner organisations through professional networks. A Welsh language version was promoted in Wales alongside the English language version. A total of 172 usable responses were received over a three week period.

- **Semi-structured telephone interviews:** questionnaire respondents were asked if they would be willing to undertake a telephone interview to explore key themes in more depth. Everyone who offered to participate was contacted, with a total of 30 one-to-one interviews completed with a cross-section of consultation participants.

- **Stakeholder workshop:** initial findings from the questionnaire and telephone interviews were presented at a SCiP Alliance Stakeholder Day held at the University of Winchester (30th April 2018). This was followed by small group discussions, involving a total of 32 participants, exploring how the SCiP Alliance should respond to these initial findings. The reflections of stakeholders were also used to review and refine the key themes identified from the consultation.

1.3   Data Analysis

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

- **Schools:** Primary School or Academy; Secondary School or Academy;
- **Other Education Stakeholders:** Sixth Form College; Further Education College; University- Widening Participation or Outreach; University- Student Services;
- **Non-Education Stakeholders:** MoD; Charity or Third Sector Organisation; Local Authority; Other.

Qualitative data from free-text questionnaire responses, interviews and the stakeholder workshop were analysed to identify key themes. These themes were not pre-determined, but emerged from the data set. The analysis identified key themes for each stakeholder group.

The qualitative themes that were identified were remarkably consistent despite the different stakeholder perspectives. For this reason, the report primarily focusses on the common themes identified across all stakeholder groups, as these represent the key areas for shared action.

1.4   Profile of Questionnaire Respondents

The analysed sample of 172 responses represented a good mix of stakeholder perspectives. Responses were received from all UK regions, including 18% from the devolved nations. The sample provided a good balance of sector representation and professional roles:

- **Sector representation:**
  - School stakeholders (49%);
  - Other education stakeholders (26%);
  - Non-education stakeholders (25%).

- **Time spent on work related to Service children:**
  - Less than 10% of work time (27%);
  - Between 10% and 50% of work time (23%);
  - More than 50% of work time (26%);
  - None (8%);
  - Don't know/ it varies (16%).

- **Professional role:**
  - Regular direct work with young people (44%);
  - One-off/ periodic direct work with young people (15%);
  - Management or Strategy (31%);
  - Research or Policy (10%).

Section 2 – Setting the Scene

The consultation sought to understand the current experience of practitioners, in particular regarding their confidence in understanding the needs of and opportunities for Service children. The views of respondents were also sought on the availability of resources to support their practice. This section summarises the views of respondents on 'the world as it is now', in order to set the scene for identifying priorities for future action.

2.1   Defining a 'Service child'

There is no universally recognised definition of a 'Service child'. For the purposes of this consultation, the definition used was based on the eligibility criteria for the Service Pupil Premium for English schools:

> *A child or young person who has one or both parents currently serving in the regular armed forces, or who has done so at any point in the last five years. This includes children or young people with a parent who is on full commitment as part of the full time reserve service.*

Questionnaire respondents were asked to comment on the suitability of this definition. Overall, the majority of respondents said that this was an appropriate definition (82%). However, one in five respondents suggested that this definition should be revised. A very small number suggested that the definition was too broad, e.g. it should only include children of those currently serving in the armed forces, but the majority wanted to see the definition extended in one or more of the following ways:

- Removing the five year 'time limit' to include those who have ever experienced a parent serving in the armed forces. This was highlighted to acknowledge that:
  - Experiences can have an ongoing impact for children and young people;
  - Transition to civilian life can present its own challenges for many Service families, which can impact on a child's education and progression.
- Including the children of civilian support staff and part-time reservists, where they have similar experiences regarding mobility and deployment.
- Including children who have a close relative other than a biological parent who is serving/ has served in the armed forces.

Despite the working definition likely to be most familiar to respondents from England, opinions on its suitability were consistent across all home nations. In general, respondents who suggested a revision to the definition were those with most experience of working with Service children, and in particular those whose professional role involved a high proportion of their time on work related to Service children. This suggests that, despite the definition used being generally acceptable to the majority of respondents, there would be some value in reviewing this definition to ensure that the SCiP Alliance's work includes all of the intended group.

2.2   The unique opportunities and challenges for Service children

The SCiP Alliance is focussed on addressing the challenges and opportunities that arise as a result of a Service child's specific experience, and are therefore distinct from the challenges

'Service children's experiences can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups.' (n=172)?

Total	45%	31%	11% 10%
University/ College	18%	38%	9% 33%
School	51%	32%	12%
LA/ MoD/ Charity/ Other	60%	21%	12% 5%

■Completely Agree ■Mostly Agree □Slightly Agree □Slightly Disagree ■Mostly Disagree ■Completely Disagree □N/A

'Service children's experiences can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups.' (n=155)?

Total	50%	34%	12%
University/ College	27%	57%	13%
School	51%	32%	12%
LA/ MoD/ Charity/ Other	63%	22%	12%

■Completely Agree ■Mostly Agree □Slightly Agree □Slightly Disagree ■Mostly Disagree ■Completely Disagree
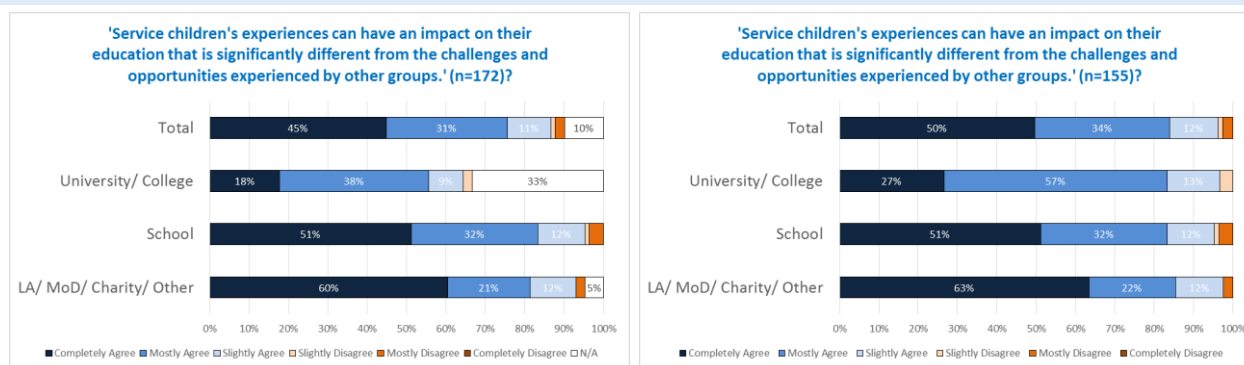
Fig 1: Stakeholder views on the extent to which the challenges and opportunities experienced by Service children are significantly different from those experienced by other groups of children and young people. The chart on the left includes those responding 'N/A' and shows that a third of university/college respondents do not have experience of working with this cohort. The chart on the right excludes those responding 'N/A' and shows that, when only considering responses from those who have experience of working with Service children, the proportion who 'completely' or 'mostly' agree with the statement is very similar across all stakeholder groups.

and opportunities related to educational success and progression that may be experienced by other groups of children and young people. Stakeholders were asked, based on their experience of working with Service children, the extent to which the agreed or disagreed 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". Figure 1 shows that three quarters of respondents overall (76%) either 'completely' or 'mostly' agreed with this statement. This was lower among university and college colleagues, although a third of these respondents (33%) did not have direct experience of working with Service children. When respondents who do not have experience of working with Service children are removed, the proportion of respondents who strongly agree with the statement is consistent across sectors, at an average of 84%.

This indicates that the more experience practitioners have of working with Service children, the more likely they are to agree that Service children experience distinctive challenges or have distinctive opportunities. In many cases, this response was accompanied by a recognition of the similarities between the experience of some Service children and some other groups, but with a Service child nuance that warranted specific consideration. This may also 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. This would appear to be particularly true for university and college stakeholders, many of whom explicitly stated that they had little knowledge or direct experience of working with Service children.

2.3   Practitioner confidence

Questionnaire respondents were asked to rate their confidence in three areas related to understanding and meeting the needs of Service children. Overall confidence in understanding the challenges experienced by many Service children was high, with 80% of respondents strongly agreeing with this statement (fig 2). Confidence in understanding the advantages that many Service children identify as a result of their experience was somewhat lower, with 68% of respondents strongly agreeing with this statement.

However, the confidence of university and college respondents was significantly lower than for those from other sectors, perhaps reflecting the relative lack of experience in working with Service children among this group. In contrast, the confidence of university and college respondents with supporting Service children to make informed choices about their future
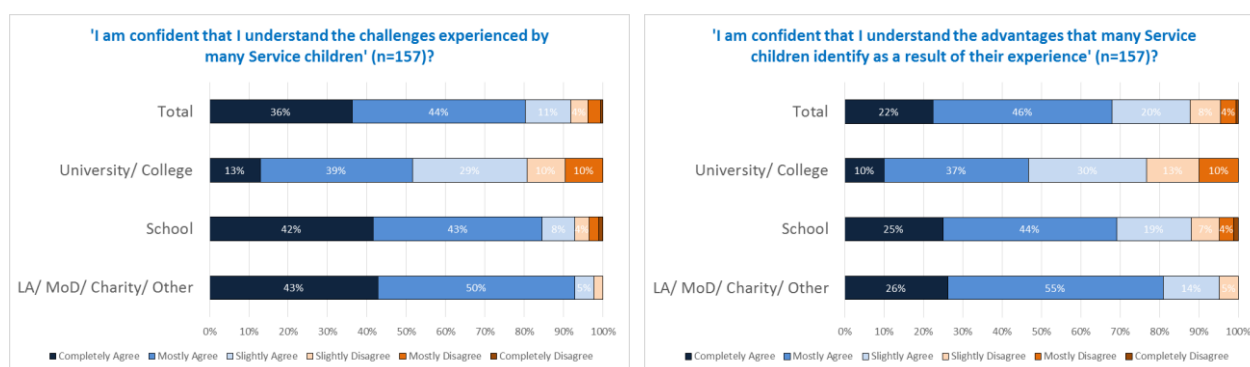
Fig 2: Stakeholder confidence in understanding the experience of Service children (respondents selecting 'N/A' removed).
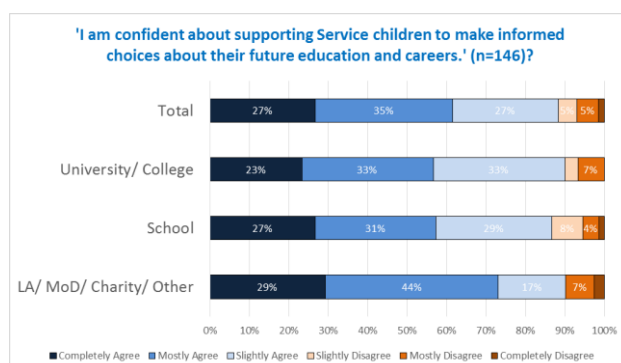

Fig 3: Stakeholder confidence in supporting Service children to make informed choices about their future education and careers (respondents selecting 'N/A' removed).

education and careers was similar to that of respondents from other sectors (fig 3), possibly because this is an area of work in which they have more general expertise on which to draw.

Schools and non-education stakeholders expressed lower confidence with supporting Service children to make informed choices about their future education and careers than their level of confidence with understanding challenges and opportunities for Service children. A significant minority of primary school respondents selected the 'not applicable' option for this last statement, with around a third of primary school respondents questioning the relevance of this topic area to their roles, mostly because progression to further and higher education and choice of career options was regarded as 'a long way off' for their pupils. This contrasts with the majority of respondents overall who suggested that developing a general awareness of possible future career and education options at a young age is an important precursor for educational and career progression, with universities and charities in particular emphasising the importance of this among cohorts with low levels of participation in higher education.

2.4   Current access to resources

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'Whenever I have looked for resources to support Service children, it has been easy to find what I need'. Although respondents were more likely to agree with this statement than disagree, only one in four (27%) strongly agreed (fig. 4). Almost a quarter strongly disagreed with this statement (23%).

University and college respondents were less likely than other groups to have been able to find what they need. Of those from this group who had looked for resources, only a third agreed with the statement (32%), with 44% strongly disagreeing.

This indicates that there is a need to raise awareness of existing resources and/or to develop additional resources to address identified gaps.
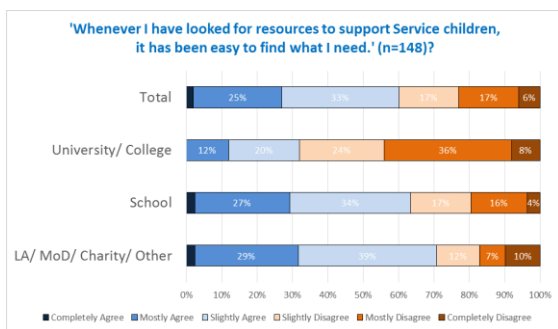
Fig 4: Stakeholder success in identifying resources
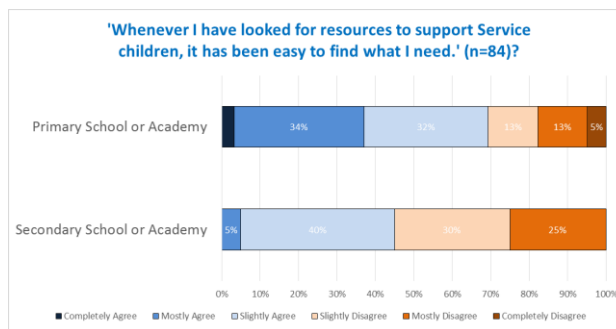(respondents selecting 'N/A' removed).

Fig 5: School success in identifying resources

2.4.1 Schools

Secondary schools were much less likely than primary schools to have found appropriate resources to support Service children (fig 5). Schools were asked if they were aware of and/or involved with five programmes for Service children: MKC Heroes; Little Troopers; Reading Force; Royal Caledonian Education Trust's Education Programme (in Scotland); Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru Network (in Wales). The same proportion of primary and secondary schools were aware of at least one of these programmes (62%), but primary schools were almost twice as likely to be currently participating (primary schools: 46%; secondary schools 24%). Programmes were rated highly by participants; but even those currently participating generally expressed a desire for additional resources.

Several non-education stakeholders suggested that, in general, primary schools were more active in engaging with their Service children than were secondary schools. However, most secondary school respondents suggested that existing resources were usually targeted at primary age groups. Several explained that, from their experience, the most effective way of engaging the older age groups was through support that did not 'label' or 'single out' Service children. Examples were given of secondary schools engaging Service children more effectively through groups that included non-Service friends. This is an important consideration for resource development, suggesting a need to recognise the specific needs of Service children within wider work, rather than working with Service children in isolation.

2.4.2 Service pupil premium (SPP)

Schools in England are eligible for additional funding to support Service children. These schools were asked their views on the evidence base for effective use of SPP (see fig 6). Overall confidence among schools was high, with 70% strongly agreeing that their school had the knowledge and resources to make most effective use of SPP. However, less than half strongly agreed that they had found it easy to find evidence-based examples of effective use of SPP (42%), with almost a quarter strongly disagreeing (24%).

Confidence was notably higher among primary school respondents, of whom 76% strongly agreed that their school had the knowledge and resources to make most effective use of SPP, compared to just 46% of secondary school respondents. In addition, 48% of primary school respondents strongly agreed that they could easily find evidence-based examples of effective use of SPP, compared to just 23% of secondary school respondents. This may be a reflection of the perception that existing resources are mostly targeted at primary age groups.
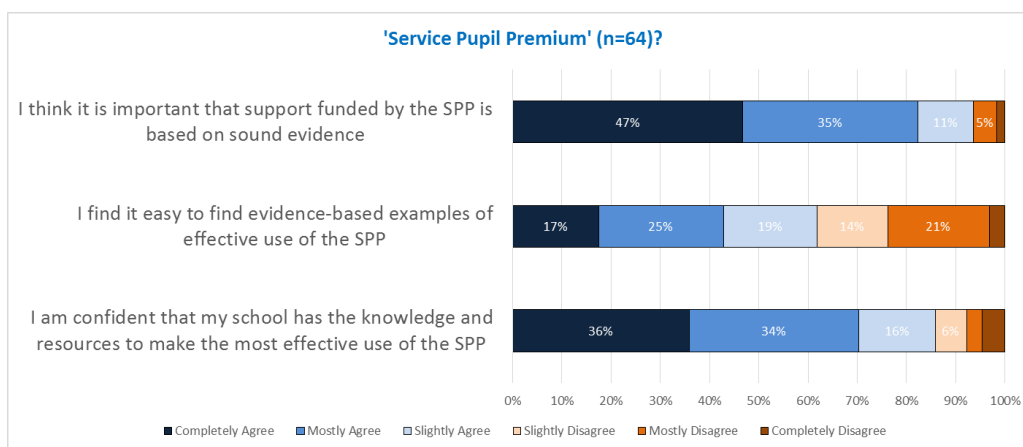
'Service Pupil Premium' (n=64)?

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
I think it is important that support funded by the SPP is based on sound evidence	47%	35%	11%		5%	
I find it easy to find evidence-based examples of effective use of the SPP	17%	25%	19%	14%	21%	
I am confident that my school has the knowledge and resources to make the most effective use of the SPP	36%	34%	16%	6%		

Fig 6: Schools views on making most effective use of Service Pupil Premium (SPP)

2.4.3   Universities

Service children are recognised as a target group of students currently under-represented within higher education. Universities and colleges can choose to recognise Service children within their higher education access agreements. Of the 34 university and college respondents who answered these questions:

- 76% were aware that Service children were a recognised target group;

- 35% said that their institution currently recognises Service children as a target group within its access agreement;

- 56% were aware of the relative under-representation of Service children within higher education.

Many university respondents highlighted that they have limited experience of working with Service children, and in several cases are only just beginning to work with this cohort.

2.5   Acknowledging complexity

The focus of this consultation was on identifying common themes among stakeholders in order to identify priorities for shared action. The analysis found a clear convergence of strong themes relevant to all stakeholder perspectives. However, it is important to acknowledge that these identified themes do not represent the experience of every Service child, either individually or in combination. Indeed, many respondents went to great lengths to emphasise the significant variations that they perceived in the experiences of Service children. Significant areas of variation identified by respondents include:

- Different structures, operational patterns and, to some extent, cultures in the different branches of the armed services, as well as between different ranks within the same service. These lead to incredibly varied individual experiences for Service children.

- Education is a devolved policy area, leading to significant variations in experience between Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. This can also lead to complications for those who move between the home nations during their school years, and when planning for college or university.

- Regional and local variations in the structure of services related to education, social and health support exist over and above the variations in policy between home

nations. These mean that the support available to individuals can vary considerably, and that there may be a lack of continuity of support when an individual relocates.

- Many respondents also highlighted that the impact of an experience on an individual depended on many factors. These include their previous experience, family expectations, their personality, and the nature of an individual's support network, both in terms of their family structure and their wider connections. This means that, even for those with objectively similar experiences, the impacts of those experiences may be very different.

- Impacts of an experience can be both positive and negative for an individual. For example, family separation brought about by deployment may be a source of stress and anxiety, but may also enable a young person to develop a sense of independence and resilience. This means that there is complexity not just in the experiences of different Service children, but also in how individuals respond to those experiences.

> *"The figures are quite skewed really. We've got children here who are actually very disadvantaged, but because the family are working, they're hitting just above the threshold. It's a hidden level of deprivation that we just don't get to the bottom of. Some comparative datasets around the families we deal with in comparison to some of the more higher ranking families would be an interesting idea…"*

> *"They get a lot of opportunities from it… some of our children are on the fourth or fifth school and they'll have experienced living in two or three different countries. But they'll also have experienced loss, bereavement, anxiety…"*

> *"Service children are far more confident than local children. They have to make friends and alliances quickly. They have often been to many schools and are therefore adaptable to change, resilient and often more capable."*

The themes identified by this consultation represent the most commonly identified areas for action, and so define the areas in which stakeholders see a role for the SCiP Alliance. However, the acknowledged complexity means that the themes are not necessarily experienced by all Service children. Despite this, they are factors that a Service child is more likely to experience that most other young people. A few respondents talked about what they termed 'risk factors': so a Service child is more likely than the average to have experienced family separation; they are more likely to have spent time as a young carer; they are less likely to have family experience of higher education. However, none of these factors apply to all Service children; and none of them determine the educational or progression outcomes for individuals.

Section 3 – Key Themes

3.1 Understanding the Service child's perspective

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.

This consultation was tasked with identifying the needs of practitioners, rather than examining the needs of Service children. The knowledge, skills, resources and support that practitioners require are, to a large extent, defined by what they understand to be the challenges and opportunities for Service children. Therefore, it is important to note that the perceived challenges and opportunities for Service children outlined in this report are described from the perspective of practitioners.

There was a clear acknowledgement from respondents of a need to better understand the experience of Service children in their own voice. Indeed, many highlighted the challenge of professionals making assumptions about the experience of a Service child without reference to robust evidence. There was also an acknowledgement that there are many aspects of the Service child experience that are under-researched, and so lacking good quality evidence, and that the direct input of Service children, both in defining and answering key research questions, is crucial for developing a strong evidence base. It is, therefore, suggested that future work is undertaken to examine the identified themes from the Service child's perspective, not just because this responds to a need identified by practitioners, but also because it will help refine and develop a robust understanding of the context in which the work of practitioners takes place.

3.2 The central position of the military in the lives of Service families

When describing the context in which their work takes place, stakeholders consistently identified the importance of the military in shaping and defining the lives of Service children and their families. A parent's military career will often define where a child lives, where they go to school, their social network, family roles and expectations, and will usually be the central focus of a family's future plans. For those living on a military base, every aspect of their lives will be influenced if not defined by this, especially if located overseas.

In contrast, for most children and young people, a parent's occupation is generally a less significant part of their overall life experience. Families may relocate because of a parent's employment, and many aspects of family life may be affected by work demands. However, it is rare for these to be as all-encompassing as they are for many Service children.

A military career might be thought of as a 'lifestyle' rather than a 'job', and 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.

3.3 Key experiences for a Service child

In addition to noting the all-encompassing impact of the military on the life of a Service child, respondents identified three specific areas that underpin the majority of the challenges that practitioners face when seeking to support the educational attainment and progression of Service children:

- **Mobility:** the relocation of a family as a result of a parent's posting;
- **Family Separation:** a parent periodically living away from the family home due to their work commitments. Most significant for Service families is when a parent is on operational deployment, but other duties may also lead to family separation, such as participation in training exercises and undertaking non-combat roles on a military base in another part of the country;
- **Transition to civilian life:** family adjustment when a parent leaves the armed services.

These events are generally considered to be distinct from the experiences of most other children and young people. Parallels may be drawn with the circumstance of others, for example relocation because of parental occupational requirements is not unique to Service children, and there are many reasons why families may experience temporary separation and/or significant adjustment. However, even when explicitly drawing these comparisons, respondents generally identified the military context as a unique element that made a significant, qualitative difference for Service children.

For this reason, practitioners highlighted the need to fully understand the impact of these experiences as a central prerequisite for providing the most effective support to Service children.

3.3.1 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. Stakeholders from all other sectors also highlighted the impact of mobility on the educational experience of Service children, and how this can significantly affect both attainment and aspirations, and therefore future progression. Key areas included:

- **Disruption to the curriculum:** gaps in learning were most commonly mentioned for primary aged children, with many examples given of children who had missed out on key curriculum areas whilst also experiencing excessive repetition of other areas. For older age groups, incompatible exam board syllabuses were identified as a risk that may lead to a Service child achieving lower grades than they might otherwise expect, or even having to drop some subjects completely, resulting in fewer qualifications, which may then impact on their future options.
- **Administrative barriers to continuity:** many schools cited the challenge of educational records not reliably moving with a child. Moving between the different education systems of the home nations was seen as particularly problematic, although other regional and local variations were also significant.

- **Reduced opportunities for engagement:** many schools identified the frequent movement of Service families as a barrier for fully engaging parents and children with the wider school community. Examples were given of Service children being less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities than other groups, possibly because of an expectation that they be unable to complete an activity (e.g. year-long sports team competition or end-of-year arts performance), or would not be able to continue a hobby. Reduced opportunities for engaging with university outreach programmes were also identified: one widening participation officer outlined that their university's programme for engaging with children from low-participation backgrounds consisted of multiple contacts over a prolonged period of time starting at primary level; core to this was an ongoing relationship with the child's school, and so the impact of the work is reduced when children are mobile. Other respondents highlighted that Service children, in particular those living overseas, often miss out on university visit events, or wider careers activities, which generally happen infrequently and so are easily missed by those who move mid-year.

- **Additional support needs:** lack of continuity was viewed as particularly problematic for children with additional support needs, both educational and health related. Assessment processes were seen to be very localised, with relocation often requiring a lengthy process to start again from scratch.

> "Children will often disengage around six months before they know they're going to leave, then they'll take about the same amount of time to fully re-engage when they get to that new school. And if you think that most postings are two years. I've had children turn up who'll say, 'There's no point I'm only here for two years; there's no point doing this thing'…"

> "In Wales there is no service pupil premium and it is compulsory to learn Welsh… A lot of the kids struggle with it and they want to do a different language. And we don't offer German GCSE here, and a lot of the pupils have come from Germany and want to do a German GCSE… We start school a year earlier here [too]… The devolved regions are very different… It really isn't always easy to transfer and I don't think parents are always aware of that."

> "[It is challenging] feeling that their achievements made in a previous setting don't count for anything now they've moved on."

It is important to note that patterns of mobility vary significantly between the different branches of the military, and there is significant variation in the experiences of individual Service children both in terms of how often they move, and the impact of these moves. As a result, many respondents were keen to emphasise the importance of understanding the complexities of mobility, and avoiding simplistic generalisations:

- **Variations between branches:** it was noted that Army personnel are generally more mobile than those serving in other branches. However, individual career patterns can vary significantly: one teacher gave an

example of a Navy child who had attended several schools in a two year period, whilst others gave examples of Army children who had never moved.

- **Mobility more frequent for primary age groups:** several reasons were noted for secondary school age groups being less likely to experience frequent relocation, including:

  o Efforts by the MoD to reduce mobility during exam preparation periods wherever possible;

  o Older age groups being more likely to have a parent who has completed their military service;

  o Older age groups being more likely to attend boarding school.

  However, these factors do not remove the experience of mobility for older age groups. One example given was how the lower likelihood of a family being relocated during the last two years of secondary school actually increased the likelihood that they would relocate immediately after, with consequent disruption to college applications and other plans.

"[In my experience] The MoD have always agreed that the posting can be extended or the marital quarters can be extended until the pupil has finished Year 11. The only thing then is we don't know where they're going… So it's just trying to help them in the potential area they're going, but we don't have the local knowledge of which are the good courses and colleges to be going to. And also they could be going abroad — to Brunei or Cyprus or Germany. And then what will they do post-16 over there?"

- **The impact of mobility may be long–lasting:** several respondents emphasised that, in their experience, the impact of mobility can shape an individual's attitude towards education, their personal and social skills, and their aspirations. These impacts may be both positive and negative, but the important point is that they often continue well beyond the point at which an individual has settled following their relocation.

"They've had a number of very short notice moves, and she really doesn't enjoy school anymore because she's constantly worrying about the next move and it takes her such a long time to settle in. If that's how your education starts, you'll surely have had enough of it by the time you get to GCSEs."

"They said, 'We're used to moving away'. And [told me] that really helped them when it came to choosing a University because they looked at where they wanted to go, and at which University would actually be the best for them. Distance didn't come into it like it might do for other students."

"I see this constantly. This not wanting to attach themselves to any thought of the future. Military children are like this because they're so aware that life changes on a sixpence all the time".

3.3.2 Family Separation

Temporary separation caused by a Service parent undertaking their duties can be a significant source of family stress, in particular because of how it can affect the family structure. Older children in particular are likely to take on greater

responsibilities within the family during these periods. This may enable them to develop key skills, but may also affect their opportunities for engaging in extra-curricular activities, and their future education and career planning.

Several respondents also noted that the shift in family dynamic when the parent returns to the family unit represented a significant event for Service children. Some respondents suggested that this was potentially more disruptive to a young person than the point at which a parent leaves, as it often involves implicit expectations that a young person will no longer undertake roles or have responsibilities that have developed to become key elements of their self-identity.

The experience of a parent 'working away from home' is not unique to Service children. However, Service children are much more likely to have had this experience than most other groups of children and young people, and to have experienced it repeatedly and for long periods of time. In addition, the context of a military parent's duties means it is more likely that contact with a parent during their time away is much more limited than for other groups who experience periodic separation. Respondents noted that contact during separation is often infrequent, and in many cases was restricted for security reasons.

The most distinctive reason for family separation in Service families is a parent's **operational deployment**. Respondents identified that, in addition to the effects of temporary family separation, deployment to undertake a combat role results in ongoing concern for the welfare of the deployed parent. This has potential to be a source of considerable family stress.

Patterns of deployment, and other reasons for family separation, vary considerably and so, as with mobility, there is significant variation in individual experiences of these, and the resulting impact on individuals. However, respondents consistently highlighted periodic family separation as a key issue, and operational deployment as a key experience of Service children that has few parallels with that of other groups.

"If people are serving in the submarine fleet, and particularly if they're on Trident boats, that takes them out of the family just as part of their routine work. They can be away from home for three months and the entitlement of contact is once a fortnight they're entitled to a text message of no more than 140 characters and it must contain no bad news and is censored as well. So that's not normal contact. That's not even a phone call."

3.3.3 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.

3.4 Key impacts for Service children

As highlighted above, the experience of Service children may affect their educational attainment, not necessarily reduced grades but possibly a reduced number or range of subjects, which may affect their future education or career options despite their ability.

Impacts on attitudes towards learning and education were also highlighted. Respondents highlighted both the motivation of many Service children to work hard and to achieve in

spite of disruption they might have experienced, and the disengagement of others, possibly as a result of frustration at the lack of continuity, or because of their expectations of future disruption. Even where respondents noted a positive attitude towards education, they often highlighted the short-term focus of many Service children, with many suggesting that Service children were less likely than others to engage in long-term planning.

Personal skills and qualities were often mentioned, with Service children generally characterised as displaying maturity and resilience, having learnt to adapt to frequent change and emotional pressures.

However, the variation of individual experiences, and of these experiences having different impacts for different children and young people, resulted in many respondents expressing the view that there is a significant knowledge gap, and a lack of evidence-based guidance on how to best support Service children to ensure their educational success and progression. The challenge for practitioners is in identifying evidence-based practice that provides effective support to Service children and raises awareness of key challenges and opportunities, without making unhelpful assumptions about the specific impact for individuals.

Our analysis of the challenges identified by respondents highlighted 'periodic family stress' and 'a transitory mindset' as two key areas of impact. Together, these summarise the key areas that respondents identified as characterising the distinctive experiences of Service children. These areas represent how Service children may respond to their experience, including how it may shape their individual skills and character, and their thinking about the future. Therefore, it is these areas in which work to develop professional understanding and practice is most likely to have a positive impact on the outcomes for Service children:

3.4.1 Periodic family stress

The three key experiences of Service children identified above- mobility, family separation and transition to civilian life- are distinctive sources of stress for Service families. 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. Key considerations of particular relevance to supporting educational success and progression include:

- **Resilience:** many respondents suggested that the experience of learning to adapt to frequent change and emotional pressure resulted in Service children often being more mature and resilient than other groups. However, some noted that coping mechanisms often involved avoiding issues rather than addressing issues. A typical example in the context of mobility was the suggestion that if some Service children experience a challenge in school, they were more likely to disengage rather than address the issue, on the expectation that it would resolve itself when they next move. Strong coping mechanisms are undoubtedly a good thing, but some respondents suggested that simply 'coping' by passively accepting difficult situations may actually prevent a young person from thriving. Instead, it was suggested that there needed to be more focus on ensuring that Service

children were developing a 'positive' resilience that enabled them to thrive by constructively addressing challenges they faced.

> "There is this assumption that Armed Forces children just get on with it. That they're so resilient. Well, yes, they do, they are, most of them. But the cost is not recognised."

> "[It is a challenge] getting children and parents to actively engage with the school as they know that they are likely to move on again shortly."

- **Flexible support:** many respondents suggested the importance of making Service children aware of support that is available, but enabling them to have ownership of how they accessed this support to meet their needs. In particular for the secondary age group, promoting the idea that resilience is not about not needing support, but more about an individual being able to recognise what support they need, and knowing how to access this when they need it. This is particularly relevant for ensuring that Service children are empowered to fulfil their full potential, and access appropriate guidance and support in a timely fashion. Some concern was expressed that the outward appearance of many Service children may mask some support needs and so restrict an individual's potential.

> "So what we're doing in schools, I always try to involve non-Service children as well, so I tell them to bring a non-service friend with them, and they can share other experiences as well, and my numbers are increasing now their buddies can come along…"

> "I'll say, 'Is there any way that you're struggling and any way that I could support you?' Some will say, 'Can I have one-on-one because I'm really struggling with this subject.' With some, I will just go into the classroom and keep an eye on them but help the others as well so it doesn't look like I'm just there for them… I'm pupil-led. Most often, it's year 10s and 11s that say "Yeah, actually, I do need some support. Things are getting serious now!""

- **Articulating experience:** many respondents suggested that Service children are often unaware of their own skills and qualities that they have developed as a result of their experience, and so may not articulate these in a way that an employer or university would give them credit for.

> "There are skills and characteristics that students gain from moving around, but unfortunately they are not academically marked skills."

- **Family responsibilities:** respondents suggested that, for many Service children, family priorities often take precedence over their own education and career planning. This is not necessarily a conscious decision, but often a result of the family unit being the one constant.

> "A few youngsters said, look, I can't go away to do college or university courses, I'm needed at home to help. I care."

> "There isn't much that's constant for them. The parent that stays at home, that becomes their only constant. And that's why you see so many attachment issues and attachment disorders with military children… The family that remains, and your belongings, become your only constant, because they go with you wherever you live."

3.4.2   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. We have used the term 'transitory mindset' as a way of thinking that is developed as a result of experiencing frequent changes, and expecting ongoing change.

Echoing some of the findings in the previous section, 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. As discussed earlier, expectations of change may be a barrier to a Service child fully engaging with their current school and other local opportunities, and may lead to avoidance of problems rather than constructively addressing them. Examples were given of Service children being less likely to engage with extra-curricular activities, possibly due to concerns about moving on and not being able to continue a hobby, fewer social connections, and a reduced sense of long-term planning.

The strengths and potential drawbacks of this mindset are illustrated by one University respondent. They explained that, from their experience, Service children generally settled in well to University as, when compared to most first year students, they are much more prepared for and skilled at adapting to their new environment. However, Service children are more likely to experience difficulties later on when other students have generally settled, formed new friendships and fully engaged with University life.

> "Sometimes they'll veer towards the most disruptive kids because they're often the easiest to make friends with… Inevitably, they're usually quite confident and good at making friends. But whether they'll be the deeper, lasting type of friendships is a different thing really."

> "If they know they won't have family in the area, or anywhere near, when they get here, they [need] to know what is available in terms of counselling, learning support, student services… [Also] recognising those students who still want to live at home, making them feel part of the community here too… It's about avoiding social isolation… I think that [social isolation] potentially could be a barrier, definitely for Service children who will have experienced that before when moving from location to location."

> "[Military children] don't, won't, think beyond the current posting, knowing that this isn't forever. Something else will soon come along. I see that throughout all the things they do actually. The thoughts they have, the decisions they make…`Well, it doesn't really matter does it? Because we won't be here forever'…They don't see a need for commitment because everything changes. But the world doesn't actually work that does it?!"

Developing a better understanding of this 'transitory mindset' and raising awareness of its strengths and limitations, especially among those unfamiliar with the experiences of Service children, is likely to be an important part of enabling Service children to achieve their full educational and career potential.

3.5 Invisibility of Service children and their needs

One of the main challenges faced by respondents was identifying who is a Service child. There was also an acknowledgement that there is very little data available on the educational and career progression of Service children, and so much of the work currently undertaken to support this group is based on assumptions, anecdotal evidence and personal experience. Three key issues were identified:

3.5.1 Challenges identifying Service children

Respondents highlighted the issue that Service families do not necessarily self-identify, and may not feel any need to do so. This was seen to be particularly the case for families of veterans who have left the armed forces, who may not even regard themselves as a family with a 'Service child'.

Service children rarely fall into categories that might trigger support, despite having similar needs to other groups. For example, a Service child who is a young carer is unlikely to be registered as a young carer. In addition, some Service children may not want to be 'labelled': several respondents gave examples, particularly for the secondary age group, of Service children wanting to 'blend in' rather than being seen as different. Examples were given of secondary schools achieving greater engagement from Service children through programmes that provided support to all students than through targeted programmes.

Where practitioners are unable to identify Service children, they may disappear into the wider school population and any needs they may have will remain hidden.

3.5.2 Limited data on Service children's educational and career progression

There is little UK data regarding the educational and vocational progression of Service children. Respondents felt that this lack of evidence makes it is difficult to fully understand, or raise awareness of, their needs.

> "The research is just not out there to support the things that we believe should be happening on the ground. There's been the odd one or two reports, but they've been a group of children who've not had any close focus on them. That seems to be changing at the moment, which is very exciting."

3.5.3 Lack of awareness among civilian professionals

Perhaps as a consequence of the limited available data, many respondents highlighted the lack of awareness of many professionals as a significant barrier to the progression of Service children.

As discussed in section 3.3 above, many services are designed and delivered in a way that does not fit well with the lived experience of many Service children. Systemic challenges, such as funding allocations for schools in England being based on numbers on roll at one specific time of year, and application deadlines for school, college and university admissions being many months in advance, present a risk that Service children will be excluded from full participation, or resources to which they are entitled may not be available in practice.

Many university respondents openly acknowledged that they were unfamiliar with the experiences of Service children, and were seeking to develop a better

understanding of the needs of this cohort. It was also suggested that Service children can sometimes be seen as being a rather privileged group due to a perception that they have a large support network to draw on, and have benefited from a range of opportunities. This suggests that the complexity of the range of Service child experiences may result in some individual needs remaining invisible to some practitioners.

> "Awareness is low, very low. I did some training recently in a school with NQTs and they said "Why did we not have anything about this in our pre-service training? We've never even heard of this issue, never even considered it. We've had something on young carers, something on gypsy travellers, something on looked-after children, but nothing on the Armed Services."

3.6   'Service child' experiences shape aspirations

This final theme brings together the preceding themes to understand the impact of a Service child's experience on their plans, expectations and ambitions for their future. It is perhaps a truism to state that aspirations are shaped by an individual's experience. However, much like the central position of the military in a Service child's life discussed in section 3.2 above, 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.

Some respondents suggested that many Service children have a limited scope of aspirations, possibly as a result of having had experiences that are much more focussed on one aspect of their life than many other children and young people. This 'shaping' of aspirations can be very positive, for example a desire to emulate a strong, positive parental role model, or a sense of duty to make a positive contribution. However, for others, the primacy of the military in their lives may lead to a lack of awareness of wider options, or even in some cases restricted options due to a disrupted curriculum, which may have resulted in good attainment but in a restricted range of subjects.

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 a range of options available to them. Several 'risk factors' were also identified, which may increase the likelihood of a Service child having restricted or limited aspirations:

- The demographic of the armed forces is broad and complex. However, some key widening participation themes are clearly relevant to some sections, e.g. cohorts with no family history of Higher Education, which may be intensified because of the particular experiences of a Service child;

- Repeated experiences of transition may lead some Service children to avoid commitment to lengthy courses or training posts, in the expectations of future moves, choosing shorter term options;

- Some stakeholders gave examples of Service children being less likely to engage in extra-curricular activities than other groups. This may narrow the range of experience that some Service children have, which in turn may affect their options and aspirations;

- Reduced contact with school careers/ university outreach experiences due to mobility may reduce the awareness that some Service children have of options available to them;

- Service children have the advantage of experiencing much that the armed forces have to offer in terms of career options, but may have disproportionately lower experience of family/ adult friends engaged in other careers. Several respondents suggested that even where a Service child had a clear aspiration for a career in the military, they may have a poor understanding of the role of education in enabling them to follow this path;

- Disrupted curriculum and administrative problems may lead to Service children taking different GCSE options or achieving lower grades/ fewer qualifications than anticipated – leading them to discount certain options, or find that potential future education institutions or employers do not recognise their full potential.

> ''Service children are not achieving A and A* grades in the same level as non-service children. That has an impact on their ability to access Russell Group universities.''

> ''Quite a few of the youngsters were saying 'Our school doesn't expect us to go to University'. They reckoned that although they had high aspirations for themselves, they felt it wasn't necessarily matched by careers advice that they were getting from school.''

> ''Some of the families are hard to engage with… They do want the best for their children, but they'd say that [University] is something out of their reach, probably because that was their own experience.''

> There were tensions for some young people between their own and their parents' aspirations. Like, 'Is it really OK for me to do this?' One parental attitude is that of 'The army was good enough for me, and it'll be good enough for you.' Or [alternatively] 'Just look what I've done to my family by moving you all around. Please don't go into the Armed Forces because you're just going to sort of mess up your own family too.' ''

3.7   Summary of key themes

The stakeholder consultation identified practitioner views on the key experiences, challenges and opportunities for Service children, and how these may impact on their educational success and progression to thriving adult lives. It is recognised that individual experiences are very diverse, and indeed there would be value in undertaking future research to understand this diversity, from the Service child's perspective.

> ''We assume that we know as adults that we know what the issues are, but sometimes when you hear it from the children and young people, it's very different.''

Nevertheless, these themes provide an overall structure for understanding the key elements of what makes a Service child's experience distinctive that reflects all stakeholder perspectives shared through the consultation exercise. Therefore, these themes provide the foundation for providing support to practitioners to further enable the educational success and progression of Service children. This is explored further in section 4.2 below.

Section 4 – Views on the role of the SCiP Alliance

The consultation asked respondents to identify suitable priorities for the SCiP Alliance that would most effectively contribute to supporting the educational and career progression of Service children. This included open questions asking what would enable practitioners to provide more effective support, as well as exploring responses to some specific resource proposals. Interviews focussed on identifying a distinctive role for the SCiP Alliance that complemented existing resources and support.

4.1 What would help practitioners to enable Service children's progression?

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. Respondents identified a range of systemic and resource improvements that would help address challenges experienced when working with Service children, such as improved information sharing between agencies and a system to 'automatically highlight' Service children. These may not be areas in which the SCiP Alliance can take direct action, but respondents suggested that SCiP could usefully advocate for change where needed.

4.1.1 Developing a robust evidence base

Many respondents noted that there is a distinct lack of evidence relating to the progression needs of Service children. The SCiP Alliance was seen as ideally placed to identify and fill gaps in knowledge, and to become a recognised central point for the dissemination of trusted information in this area:

- Development of more complete data sets on the educational and career progression of Service children;
- Research with Service children to better understand their experience;
- Dissemination of research to support evidence-based policy and service development.

4.1.2 Trusted resources

The SCiP Alliance was seen as ideally placed to develop a bank of trusted resources:

- Creating a central directory of evidence-based practice;
- Focussing on promotion of high quality resources.

4.1.3 Awareness-raising and advocacy

Using the evidence base to raise awareness and understanding of Service life and how this may impact on the educational progression of Service children. This may include advocating for change where required, in particular to address systemic issues that are shown to create potential disadvantage for Service children.

4.1.4 Facilitation of networking and shared practice

The value of networking and partnerships to develop effective practice was emphasised by many respondents. There was recognition of variations between different areas, including the different education systems of the home nations and variations in local authority policy and practice. This suggests that practice should

not be 'directed from the centre', but supported to develop locally or regionally. The SCiP Alliance was seen to have a role in:

- Facilitating networking at a local, regional and national level;
- Identifying and promoting examples of effective practice.

4.1.5 Hearing the voice of Service children

Several respondents were of the opinion that the SCiP Alliance should ensure that Service children were actively involved in defining the areas for research. Specific mention was made of challenging assumptions that if Service children 'appeared to be OK' or did not actively seek support, that their needs were adequately met.

Many respondents from all sectors highlighted potential value in 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.

4.2   Towards a model for action

The key themes outlined in section 3 provide the context in which the work of practitioners takes place. These define the areas of knowledge and skills required by practitioners to provide effective support to Service children, and barriers that have been identified that prevent effective support from being provided.

These areas are summarised in Fig 7, and provide the foundation for identifying how the SCiP Alliance can most effectively support practitioners to enable the educational success and progression of Service children. This outlines 'what' support practitioners would most value, and is combined with responses on 'how' support could be provided most effectively.

Enabling practitioners to ensure the educational success and progression of Service children

Areas which need to be understood for practitioners to be able to provide effective support:

Distinctive **experiences** of Service families:

The central position of the military in the lives of Service families-
of much greater significance than most other parental occupations

Mobility

Family Separation (including Deployment)

Transition to civilian life

Distinctive **impacts** for some Service children:

Periodic family stress

Development of a 'transitory mind-set'

'Service child' experiences shape aspirations-
The experiences specific to being a 'Service child' are more significant than other elements of experience in shaping expectations, hopes and aspirations for the future

Systemic factors that need to be addressed to enable practitioners to provide effective support:

Administrative barriers to continuity of support and opportunities

Invisibility of Service children and their needs:
- Challenges faced identifying Service children
- Limited data
- Limited awareness among civilian professionals of the possible impacts of a Service child's experience

Areas in which practitioners would most value support from the SCiP Alliance:

Develop an evidence base to better understand the needs of Service children

Develop a 'library' of evidence- based resources

Advocate for systemic change

Facilitate networking and sharing of effective practice

Fig 7: A summary of practitioners' views on the areas of knowledge and action required to enable the educational success and progression of Service children

Section 5 – Views on suggested areas for support

The online questionnaire suggested three possible future areas of support: an online resource bank; practitioner groups to share practice and plan collaborative activities; and an annual conference. For each type of support, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that:

- The support would enable practitioners to be more effective in their role;
- The support offered something that was not available elsewhere;
- They would be interested in making use of this support.

All of the suggested areas of support were viewed positively. Overall, there was most interest in accessing online resources, especially among schools. This section summarises the views of respondents on the suggested areas of support. In all cases, respondents who selected 'N/A' were removed from the analysis before percentages were calculated.

5.1   Online Resources

Three-quarters of respondents overall strongly agreed that 'a set of online resources would enable me to be more effective in my role' (44% 'completely agree'; 32% 'mostly agree'). A small proportion of respondents from primary schools (6%) and universities (6%) strongly disagreed, usually citing relevance to their role.

When asked if this resource would offer something that is not available elsewhere, 31% 'completely' agreed, with an additional 41% 'mostly' agreeing. This contrasts with fewer than 1 in 10 respondents who disagreed with this statement, with 4% 'slightly' disagreeing and 4% strongly disagreeing. Where schools identified being involved with an existing programme (see section 2.4.1), this did not reduce the likelihood that they identified the proposed resource as offering something 'new'. This is not a reflection on the perceived quality of these existing programmes, which were all rated highly, but an indication that schools would welcome additional resources to expand and develop the support that they are able to offer.

Overall interest in making use of an online resource was high across all stakeholder groups, with 81% of respondents overall strongly agreeing (fig 8). Key points of clarification were made in free text comments:

- There was a clear preference for high quality, evidence-based resources;
- Generally, universities were not looking for resources to undertake specific work with Service children, with many preferring to adapt existing resources related to widening participation work. However, support to understand the needs of Service children would be welcomed;
- Case studies of effective practice, guidance and toolkits with suggested activities were rated as the most useful type of resource (fig 9). However, quality assurance of these items, as well as ensuring that they reflected the voice of Service children, was emphasised by many respondents. It should also be noted that, as might be expected, respondents with a direct role working with Service children were more likely to favour these types of resources, with those in a management or strategic role more likely to favour policy and/or research briefings.
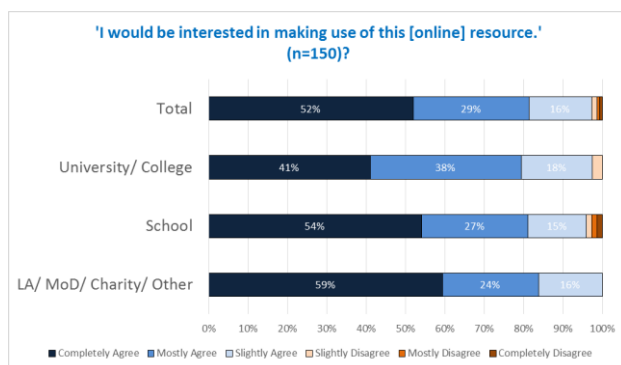
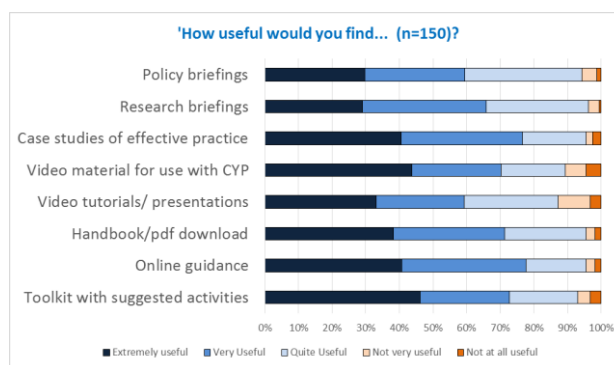Fig 8: Stakeholder interest in making use of a set of online resources (respondents selecting 'N/A' removed).

Fig 9: Levels of stakeholder interest in different types of possible online resources ('N/A' removed).

5.2 Practitioner Groups

Respondents were presented with the following description:

> *We envisage a network of 'hubs' that allow practitioners from different stakeholder organisations within an area to share challenges and effective practice, and to plan collaborative activities. We envisage each hub meeting a few times a year.*

Overall, 70% of respondents strongly agreed that this type of group would enable them to be more effective in their role, with just 4% strongly disagreeing. More than half of respondents strongly agreed that this type of group is not available elsewhere (58%), although among school respondents this dropped to just under half (49%).

Around two-thirds of respondents strongly agreed that they would be interested in joining this type of group (65%), with just 5% strongly disagreeing (fig 10). University/ college respondents were least likely to express an interest in joining this type of group, although half still did (51%). This may be a reflection of Service children being an emerging group of interest for universities, and so may grow as a result of awareness raising activities that may be undertaken in the future.

Practitioners were most likely to highlight the opportunity to share experiences with others in a similar role as the most useful potential element of such a group. Some respondents highlighted the importance of good chairing/ organisation in order to get most value from this type of group. Overall, there was greater interest in focusing on practice rather than research or policy within these groups.
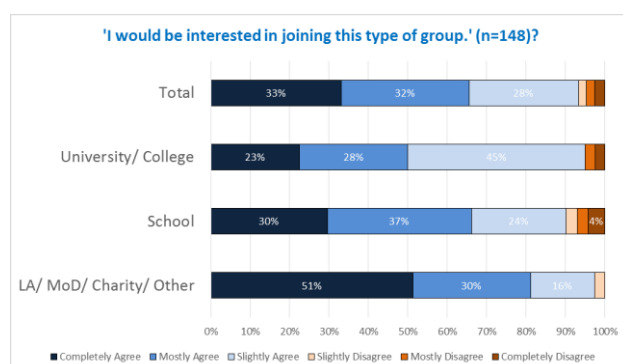

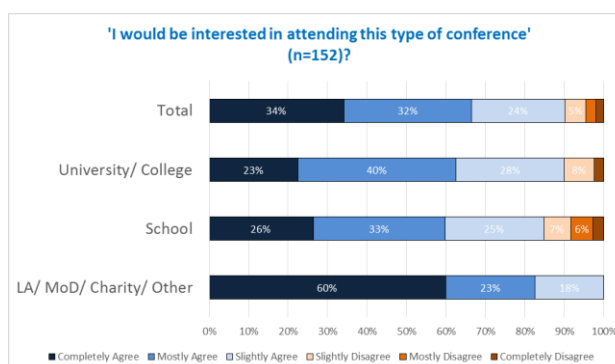Fig 10: Stakeholder interest in joining a 'Practitioner Group' (respondents selecting 'N/A' removed).

Fig 11: Stakeholder interest in attending a SCiP Alliance national conference ('N/A' removed).

5.3   National Conference

Two-thirds of respondents strongly agreed that a national conference on the subject of supporting the educational progression of Service children would enable them to be more effective in their role (65%), with 5% strongly disagreeing. More than half strongly agreed that this type of conference would offer something that is not available elsewhere (59%), although 20% of schools strongly disagreed. Explicit reference was made by several respondents to the risk of overlapping with the SCISS conference, with some suggesting that a 'SCiP stream' at the SCISS conference would be a more effective use of resources than attending an additional event.

Overall, two-thirds of respondents strongly agreed that they would be interested in attending this type of conference (66%), with 5% strongly disagreeing (fig 11). However, there was a bit of variation of interest among different stakeholder groups, with over 80% of non-education stakeholders strongly agreeing, compared with around 60% of education stakeholders. Secondary school and college respondents were least likely to express an interest in attending.

Several respondents expressed a preference for SCiP being represented at existing conferences rather than creating an additional event, with cost and time commitment highlighted as the most likely barriers to attendance. The opportunity to share experience and practice with those undertaking similar roles was seen as the most attractive element of a conference. Considerable interest in updating knowledge through research briefings was also expressed.

Section 6 – Areas for Action

Analysis of the questionnaire and interview responses identified ten 'areas for action' in four categories that, in the view of stakeholders, would create a significant positive impact on the educational and career progression of Service children. These areas for action formed the basis of discussions at the stakeholder workshop, in which participants were asked to identify "what specific changes are needed to effectively address this area of need?" It was recognised that some of these actions could be addressed by discrete projects, whereas others may require wider systemic action that may be outside of the direct control of the members of the SCiP Alliance. Respondents were asked to identify the particular role for the SCiP Alliance in working towards effective outcomes in each area for action. This section summarises the role for the SCiP Alliance identified by stakeholders through the workshop discussions, before outlining how these relate to the 'areas for action' identified through the questionnaire and interview responses.

6.1   Reflections from the stakeholder workshop

The group discussions identified four key roles for the SCiP Alliance. These closely reflect the priority roles discussed in section 4.1 above that were identified from the questionnaire and interview responses:

6.1.1   Information

Where information is available, it is not currently organised and accessible in a way that ensures comprehensive and up-to-date information was available to those working with Service children.

It was widely felt that the SCiP Alliance has a useful role in serving as a portal and/ or conduit of information, policy and best practice related to the educational and career progression of Service children.

In addition, the SCiP Alliance has a role to play in identifying areas for research to address current gaps in knowledge, undertaking primary research, and/ or disseminating reputable research in this area

6.1.2   Advocacy

The SCiP Alliance has a key role to play as an advocate for the needs of Service children regarding their educational and career progression. In particular, the SCiP Alliance has a role collating and interpreting research findings and evidence of best practice to inform the development of policy and professional guidance.

6.1.3   Training

It was felt that there was a need for guidance and training, in particular for practitioners who do not regularly work with Service children, but play a key role in their progression opportunities, including teachers, careers advisors, and university widening participation/admissions officers.

The SCiP Alliance can identify needs and co-ordinate a response to increase awareness and understanding of the experiences of Service children, the impact these experiences can have on education and progression, and identify where policy and practice could be developed to provide more effective support to this cohort.

6.1.4 Networking

It was felt that the SCiP Alliance has a central role to play in facilitating communication between practitioners from different sectors, and promoting collaborative action.

6.2 Ten 'areas for action' to support Service children's progression

These areas for action were identified from the questionnaire and interview responses. The 'role for SCiP' is based on the discussion outputs from the stakeholder workshop outlined in section 6.1 above.

Tackling the practical and administrative challenges of mobility

Area for Action 1:

Ensuring transition between schools is as smooth as possible, through timely transfer of complete information, and provision of appropriate support.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information

Area for Action 2:

Avoiding incomplete and/ or repetitious coverage of the curriculum.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information, Training

Understanding the specific social and emotional demands that many Service children can face

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information, Training

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information, Training

Supporting Service children's holistic wellbeing throughout and beyond periods of change

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Advocacy, Information, Training

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Information, Training

Engaging practitioners, families and stakeholders in building evidence and developing policy that will support Service children's progression

Area for Action 8:

Building a comprehensive, high-quality evidence base to understand the holistic educational and career progression of Service children.

Role for SCiP: Information, Networking

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Information, Networking

Area for Action 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.

Role for SCiP: Information, Networking

Section 7 – Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has summarised stakeholder views on the key areas for action required 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. The consultation identified that there is a significant need to develop the knowledge base regarding the educational and progression outcomes for Service children, and a strong desire among stakeholders for a trusted source of good quality information on effective evidence-based practice. Clear areas for action were identified, that should form the basis for the SCiP Alliance's future priorities.

This section provides strategic recommendations, based on the consultation results, to support the development of the SCiP Alliance in a way that will best meet the needs of stakeholders.

7.1   Develop a 'theory of change' and evaluation framework

Stakeholders consistently highlighted the need for adopting evidence-based practice. In addition, stakeholders identified a number of roles for the SCiP Alliance that focused on 'enabling and facilitating' rather than 'directly delivering' work including research, professional development and collaborative action.

In order to clearly communicate the ways in which the SCiP Alliance intends to enhance the educational and career progression of Service children, it is recommended that a 'theory of change' is developed. This should clearly define the different roles for the SCiP Alliance, e.g. distinguishing between direct delivery, advocacy, facilitation, etc. The theory of change should be supported by an evaluation framework to assess progress. This will help engage stakeholders by providing evidence of the impact of the SCiP Alliance's activities.

7.2   Ensure the voice of Service children is central to future plans

The SCiP Alliance is a network of practitioners. Therefore, the priorities of the SCiP Alliance should focus on the support needs of practitioners. However, as clearly identified by this consultation, the needs of Service children define the areas in which practitioners need support, whether that be through provision of evidence of the needs of Service children to support practice, or through work to facilitate policy developments to mitigate some of the challenges faced by Service children.

Much emphasis was given to the issues created by unevidenced assumptions made about the experiences and needs of Service children. Therefore, it is important that the SCiP Alliance ensures that the voice of Service children is central to future plans. This is especially true for the secondary age group, where the consultation has suggested that there may be greater unmet needs. This is possibly as a result of Service children not wanting to be 'labelled', and so emphasising the importance not just providing the right support, but also providing it in the right way.

7.3   Identify actions to support university and FE college stakeholders

Whilst all stakeholder groups identified areas in which they would welcome support to develop knowledge and practice, respondents from universities and FE colleges were most likely to identify a need to develop their understanding of the needs and opportunities for

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Service children. This is likely to be due in part to the relatively recent addition of Service children to the groups that can be explicitly recognised within a Higher Education Access Agreement. This suggests that there would be value in identifying some short term actions to raise awareness of Service children among university and college stakeholders, and to engage with those colleagues for whom this is a new area of work. Not only would this provide useful support to these colleagues, but would also help address the issues identified by other stakeholder groups that are created by practitioners not fully understanding the circumstances of Service children.

7.4   Prioritise the development of a high quality evidence base

There is a clear demand for more complete information on the experiences of Service children, as well as easily accessible evidence-based examples of effective practice. The SCiP Alliance would meet a clear need by developing the evidence base, e.g. through undertaking primary research or collating research evidence and examples of effective practice, and becoming the recognised route for disseminating evidence relevant to the educational and career progression of Service children.

7.5   Facilitate localised ownership of collaborative action

Despite the consistent shared themes identified by the consultation, there is significant variation in the experiences of Service children, to the extent that it is most probably inappropriate to conceive of 'Service children' as a single cohort with a consistent set of needs. Many factors contribute to this variation, including the geographical differences in policy and practice. Most notably, the devolved education systems create differences between the home nations; but there are also many examples of local factors that create specific challenges and opportunities.

Stakeholders expressed a strong preference for localised ownership of collaborative action that developed an effective response to the needs of Service children within the local context, rather than 'being directed from the centre'. Evidence from this work should then be collated and shared in order to develop understanding of the needs of Service children and support effective practice to address these needs. In other words, the development of the knowledge and evidence base on which stakeholders can draw should be used to guide and develop locally relevant practice, not to provide a restrictive blueprint for action.

7.6   Harness the enthusiasm of stakeholders

The consultation identified a clear enthusiasm from stakeholders for the SCiP Alliance. There is almost universal agreement that there is a need for work to be undertaken to better understand the educational and career progression needs of Service children, and very few concerns were expressed that the SCiP Alliance risked duplicating existing work. This was in part due to a recognition of, and gratitude for, the efforts made to date to ensure that the SCiP Alliance is collaborative and adds value to existing provision.

Stakeholders were enthusiastic about the benefits that the SCiP Alliance could bring to their work, in particular around developing the knowledge base and increasing capacity through collaborative action. Several respondents expressed an explicit desire to make an active contribution to the SCiP Alliance, indicating both a preference for and the viability of a model that is based on facilitating collaborative action.