

STATE OF THE SECTOR 2025

*An assessment of the opportunities,
challenges and priorities for the community
supporting the children of serving and ex-UK
Armed Forces personnel*

NOVEMBER 2025

Generously funded by



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance is a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. The SCiP Alliance is built on collaborative action. This report was made possible by the many contributions of partners and stakeholders to ensure that all stakeholder perspectives were represented. We would also like to thank all the consultation participants for being so generous with their time and their expertise.

Data collection and analysis was undertaken on behalf of the SCiP Alliance by Tiller Research Ltd.

This report has been generously funded by Greenwich Hospital. The SCiP Alliance is led by the University of Winchester and supported by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

The Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP Alliance) defines a Service child as "a person whose parent, or carer, serves in the regular Armed Forces, or as a reservist, or has done at any point during the first 25 years of that person's life."

In this report, we use the term "children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel", "children and young people from Armed Forces families" and "Service children" to describe the children who meet this definition.



Ministry
of Defence

FOREWORD

The history and future of the SCiP Alliance is a story of community and impact. This report, our first State of the Sector review since 2022, is both a reflection of the progress we have made together and a call to action for the work still to be done.

Since our last consultation, the sector has grown in confidence, capability and collaboration. The evidence base is expanding, professional networks are strengthening, and the voices of children and young people from Armed Forces families are increasingly shaping the support they receive. These are signs of a maturing sector, one that is more connected, more informed, and more ambitious for the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

This report confirms that the sector is rich in assets: from high-quality resources and strong relationships to a growing awareness of the cohort's distinct experiences. It also highlights persisting challenges—e.g. mobility support, data gaps, and the interaction of national policy and local practice—that limit the scale of impact we want for Service children. And it highlights the need to engage all parts of the sector more fully in that mission.

What stands out to me is the sector's sustained and shared commitment to making a difference. Practitioners across settings show increasing confidence in their ability to support Armed Forces children and young people, and they are clear about what would help them do even more: better data, smarter policy, stronger networks, and sustained investment.

The SCiP Alliance exists to help realise that potential. We bring together allies from across the UK to build evidence, shape policy, and enhance practice. We do this not just to improve systems, but to improve lives. And we do it together—because the community makes the impact possible.

I am delighted with the progress we have made as a community, and I am energised by the clarity of purpose this report helps provide. It is a testament to the sector's strength and a roadmap for our shared future. Let's use it to deepen our collaboration, sharpen our focus, and accelerate our impact—so that every child from an Armed Forces family can thrive.



Philip Dent
Director
Service Children's
Progression
Alliance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

The SCiP Alliance commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake a consultation exercise with stakeholders from across the SCiP Alliance community. This included identifying:

- the persisting and changing needs of those who support the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel;
- the policy developments, research insights and practical resources that will enable the community to sustain and enhance their work, ensuring the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel are able to thrive.

This report outlines the key findings from the UK-wide State of the Sector research. Analysis includes comparison with data from previous SCiP Alliance consultations undertaken in 2018 and 2022, examining how the sector has changed over time.

THE STATE OF THE SECTOR IN 2025

WHERE WE ARE

The sector demonstrates growing confidence among practitioners in understanding and supporting children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. Access to resources and training has improved, and collaboration between organisations is strong. However, challenges persist, including gaps in tailored resources for early years and post-16 settings, inconsistent policy application, and limited funding.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Progress has been driven by increased professional awareness, stronger relationships, and a growing evidence base. National policy developments and local recognition of the cohort have contributed positively, alongside efforts to include children and young people in decision-making. Despite these gains, underlying issues such as mobility, additional needs, and policy complexity remain significant barriers.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

Stakeholders emphasise the need for policy solutions addressing mobility and healthcare challenges, greater awareness among service providers, and improved funding. Expanding networks, creating tailored resources, and closing data gaps—particularly on outcomes and longitudinal impact—are key priorities. The sector aims to focus on initiatives that deliver measurable, positive change for Armed Forces children.

The SCiP Alliance 2025 State of the Sector Report provides invaluable insight into seven areas, explored in detail in the full report.

¹ SCiP Alliance mission: <https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page>

1. SECTOR ASSETS – A STRONG FOUNDATION

Strong collaboration, a wide range of support organisations, accessible resources, growing evidence, and professional awareness are key strengths in the sector, creating a rich foundation for supporting children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

2. PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS – CONFIDENCE AND DIVERSITY

Engaged practitioners feel confident supporting Armed Forces children and recognise their unique challenges, though supporting career success is seen as less relevant to some, and significant differences across practitioner groups show the sector's diversity.

3. RESOURCES AND SUPPORT – REACH AND RESEARCH

Practitioners report ready access to quality resources, training, and research, but gaps remain, especially for early years and post-16 settings; priorities include expanding the reach of networking, resources for non-specialists, and research to data gaps.

4. FUNDING AND POLICY – SIGNIFICANT VARIATION

Opinions vary widely on the state of funding and policy support for professionals' work with Armed Forces children, with big differences both within and between practitioner groups; variations between national, devolved and local policy play a key role.

5. KEY CHALLENGES – RESOURCE, DATA, POLICY

Practitioners face challenges including limited funding, policy gaps, data shortages, and balancing visibility with diversity, alongside complexities from devolved policy and the cohort's varied circumstances.

6. SECTOR TRENDS – A MATURING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Practitioner confidence and resource access have improved, supported by growing awareness, policy progress, and inclusion of young voices; local application of national policy and long-standing cohort challenges mean system-level issues persist.

7. SECTOR PRIORITIES – WHOLE-SYSTEM SOLUTIONS

Professionals call for systemic improvements, including: policy solutions for mobility and healthcare, greater national awareness, stronger support for networking and collaboration, closing data gaps, and a focus on meaningful, measurable impact.



1.0 SECTOR ASSETS

A STRONG FOUNDATION

Strong collaboration, a wide range of support organisations, accessible resources, growing evidence, and professional awareness are key strengths in the sector, creating a rich foundation for supporting children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

Stakeholders identified what is currently working well within the overall support available for the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. Key themes identified were:

- Broad range of support organisations
- Availability of resources
- Collaboration and knowledge sharing
- A growing evidence base
- Strong relationships
- Growing professional awareness of the cohort

These themes indicate a rich mix of positive assets supporting work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

1.1 BROAD RANGE OF SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

Respondents noted a solid core of charities and other organisations that provide direct support, high quality resources, and/or conduct research.

●● *More and more the various charities working in this sector are starting to collaborate.*

University widening participation

●● *There are strong and capable organisations who are motivated and work tirelessly to make their lives better.*

Charity

●● *Lots of voluntary organisations individually doing great things.*

Local Authority

●● *UniConnects that identify Service children as a targeted group often offer helpful outreach opportunities for them.*

Independent provider

●● *The work of SSCE Cymru has also been instrumental in raising awareness, providing practical resources, and promoting consistency in how Service children are supported across education settings.*

Local authority

1.2 AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES

Many respondents, in particular those working in schools, noted the availability of high-quality resources to support work with this cohort. This includes:

- practical resources to use when delivering direct work, such as materials from national charities;
- strategic development and planning resources, such the Thriving Lives Toolkit;
- enabling resources, such as access to training and professional development.

Many English schools noted the Service Pupil Premium as a positive resource to provide specific support or resources for this cohort, albeit with caveats suggesting how its value and impact could be enhanced.

●● *Story book waves and Little Troopers.*

Primary school

●● *There are a lot of valuable resources and organisations available to support Service children.*

Local authority

●● *Thriving Lives Toolkit as it supports me with advocating for my work plus for the children.*

Charity

1.3 COLLABORATION AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Many respondents noted an appetite and willingness for service providers to work together to improve the lives of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. This includes both collaboration at local level between organisations such as schools, charities, health providers and the Armed Forces community, and collaboration at regional or national level to share best practice and inform policy.

●● *I firmly believe that we achieve far more for the Armed Forces community when we collaborate together on initiatives than by working in isolation."*

Charity

●● *Engaging educators and professionals to share research and best practice."*

University widening participation

●● *Collaborative working practices."*

MOD

●● *Schools coming together in local clusters or networks has been highly effective in strengthening support."*

Secondary school



1.4 A GROWING EVIDENCE BASE

Respondents noted the existence of a growing evidence base of research. This makes a valuable contribution to evidence-based practice and policy development. Ongoing efforts within the sector to improve data quality and insight were identified as an additional strength, as limitations of the current evidence base were noted.

●● *Whenever I'm going into schools and talking about my programme, I can refer to the research that's already been taken and say, look this supports the programme that we're developing."*

Charity

●● *Research is one of the biggest things really because so often as we go round schools... you can actually point to and say, there's the evidence."*

Independent provider

1.5 STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

School respondents from areas with larger cohorts of children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel noted the presence of strong local networks that enabled timely access to support, and strong relationships with families.

●● *Our service children's club and linking us to our local RBL - crossing generations has helped the whole community."*

Primary school

●● *Support from the wider Armed Forces community."*

Secondary school

●● *Where partnership work is in place to benefit Service children and this is proactive rather than reactive. This is the ideal picture; there are pockets of this at different locations."*

MOD

1.6 GROWING PROFESSIONAL AWARENESS OF THE COHORT

Positive examples were shared of growing professional awareness among local service providers of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as a specific cohort with distinct needs. Key enabling factors include:

- the Armed Forces Covenant making a positive contribution to raise awareness, despite frustrations expressed about uneven implementation across different agencies and localities;
- national policy developments, such as recognition of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as an under-represented group in higher education;
- efforts to ensure the voices of children and young people from Armed Forces families are heard in the design of services and policies that affect their lives, although currently these are often limited to older age groups;
- explicit commitments to support this cohort within individual organisations and/or local networks, such as specific training or resource allocation, or a nominated champion.

●● *Ambassador programmes, peer leadership initiatives, and local events are giving service children opportunities to shape their support and raise awareness among peers and staff."*

Secondary school

●● *Recognition that they are a unique cohort with distinct needs that need addressing."*

Charity

●● *There is growing professional awareness of the emotional and social challenges faced by Service children, especially around deployment, mobility, and reintegration."*

Primary school

●● *The good thing is that we've signed the Armed Forces Covenant so we're kind of bound to doing quite a lot of stuff, so hopefully it won't be lost."*

University widening participation

The themes identified in this section indicate the presence of a rich mix of positive assets that support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. They are not universally present, with a small number of respondents saying that there was little or nothing that was currently working well. Many more noted a gap in one or more of the areas above, indicating uneven access to assets across the UK. Nevertheless, the majority of respondents noted multiple positive factors that currently support and enhance their work with this cohort.



2.0 PRACTITIONER PERCEPTIONS

CONFIDENCE AND DIVERSITY

Engaged practitioners feel confident supporting Armed Forces children and recognise their unique challenges, though supporting career success is seen as less relevant to some, and significant differences across practitioner groups show the sector's diversity.

- *A large majority of practitioners strongly agree that the experiences of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups;*
- *A majority of practitioners overall express confidence in supporting the cohort to make informed choices about their future education and careers, though a significant minority of practitioners do not view this area of support as relevant to their role;*
- *There are notable differences in expressed opinions and confidence between practitioner subsets, indicating that the sector is best understood as a coalition of complementary components rather than as a single entity.*

2.1 CONFIDENCE SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ARMED FORCES FAMILIES

Practitioners typically express a high level of confidence in understanding the situation and experiences of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, and are confident providing support to this cohort:

- 81% of respondents either completely or mostly agree that they are confident they understand the advantages that many of these children and young people identify as a result of their experience (fig 1);
- 91% of respondents either completely or mostly agree that they are confident they understand the challenges experienced by many of these children and young people (fig 2);
- 84% of respondents either completely or mostly agree that they are confident about supporting the children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel to thrive (fig 3).

Two practitioner subsets expressed somewhat lower average levels of confidence than the overall average:

- University and college practitioners express the lowest overall levels of confidence in their understanding of this cohort. Respondents from further and higher education are the least likely to have a significant proportion of their role dedicated to work with this cohort (fig D in Appendix A), which is likely to explain, at least in part, the lower levels of expressed confidence in understanding the cohort's particular needs;
- Early Years respondents express levels of confidence below the overall average. It was noted throughout the consultation that the resources and support for Early Years practitioners working with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel is less developed than for schools and universities, which is a likely contributor to the lower levels of confidence expressed.

Fig 1: Practitioner confidence in understanding the advantages identified by many Armed Forces children

I am confident that I understand the advantages that many of these children and young people identify as a result of their experience (n=173)

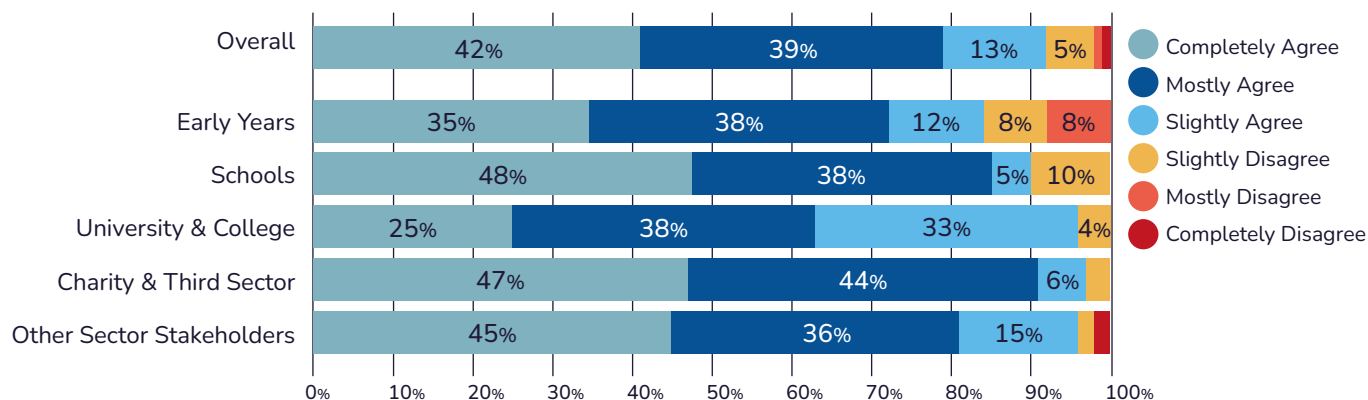


Fig 2: Practitioner confidence in understanding the challenges identified by many Armed Forces children

I am confident that I understand the challenges experienced by many of these children and young people (n=173)

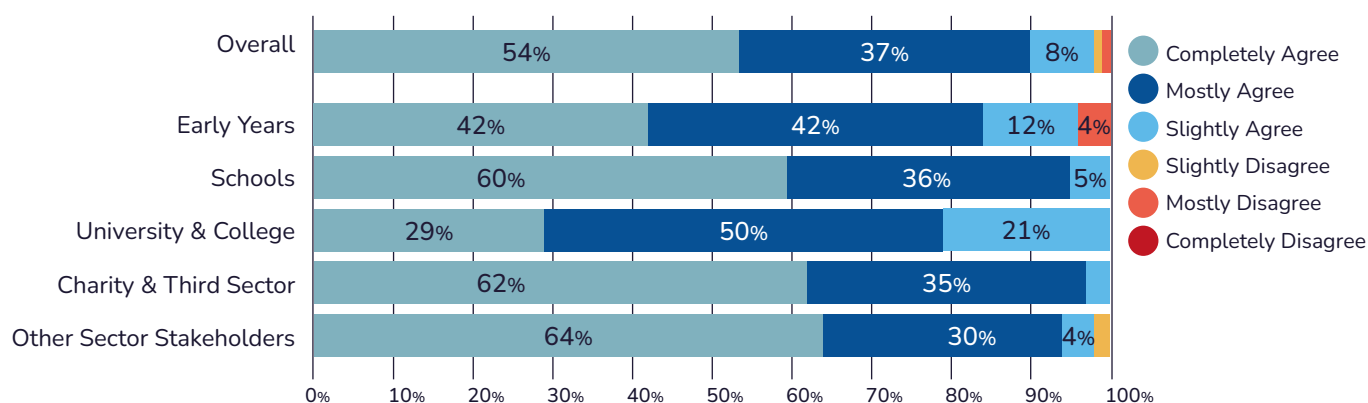
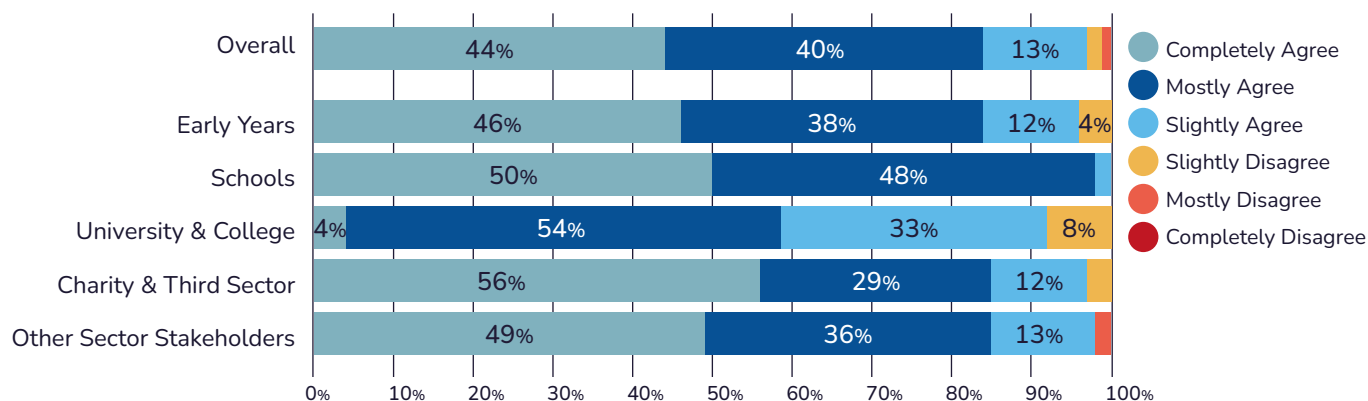


Fig 3: Practitioner confidence in supporting Armed Forces children to thrive

I am confident about supporting the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel to thrive (n=173)



2.2 CONFIDENCE IN SUPPORTING CHOICES ABOUT FUTURE EDUCATION AND CAREERS

A majority of practitioners overall express confidence in supporting Armed Forces children to make informed choices about their future education and careers. Overall confidence in this area is somewhat lower than confidence in providing general support (fig 4).

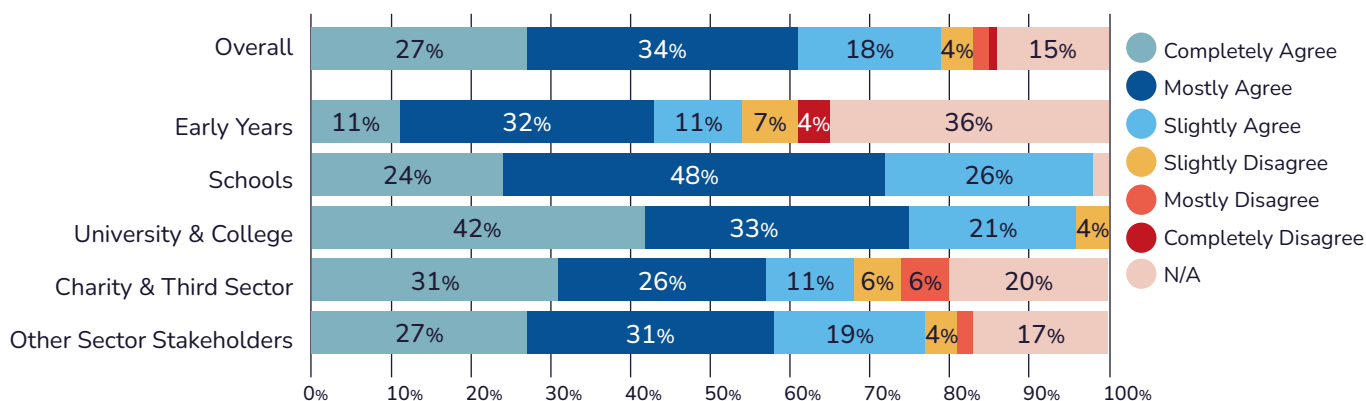
There are variations in responses from practitioner subsets:

- School, university and college practitioners are most likely to express high levels of confidence supporting choices about future education and careers;
- A significant proportion of respondents expressed the view that this area of support was not relevant to their role, including 36% of early years practitioners and 20% of charity and third sector respondents;
- University and college practitioners express the highest levels of confidence supporting choices about future education and careers, in sharp contrast to their lower confidence than other practitioner subsets with understanding the needs and opportunities of the cohort. University and college respondents were most likely to have a role promoting access to education and future careers (fig B), and typically had a lower than average proportion of working time related to this cohort (fig D). These role characteristics likely provide at least part of the explanation for differences in confidence in supporting career choices.



Fig 4: Practitioner confidence in supporting Armed Forces children to make informed career choices

I am confident about supporting this group of children and young people to make informed choices about their future education and careers (n=173)





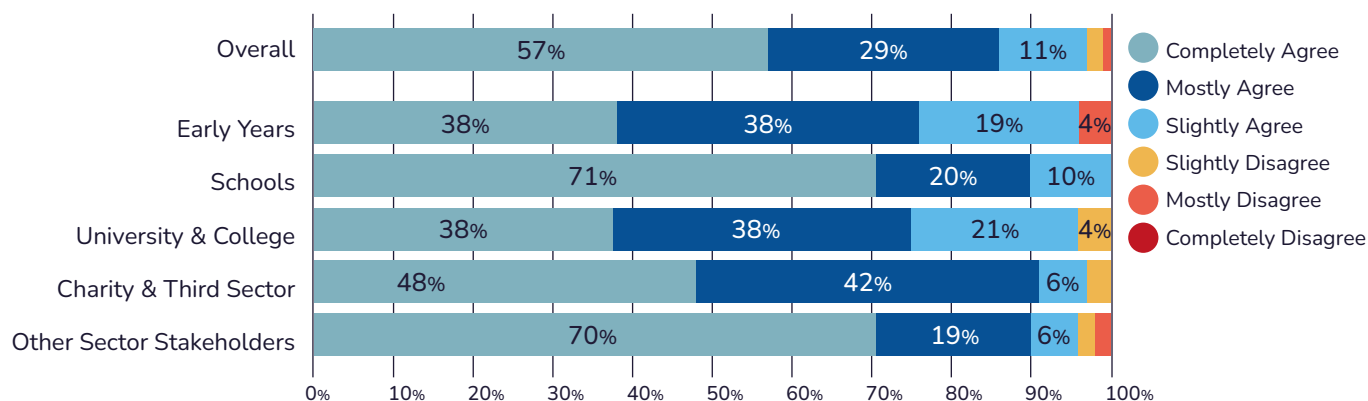
2.3 VIEW ON THE IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCES OF ARMED FORCES CHILDREN

A large majority of practitioners strongly agree that the experiences of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups. Overall, 86% of respondents completely or mostly agree that Armed Forces children can experience distinctive impacts related to their Armed Forces identity. Schools and 'other sector stakeholders'- including MOD and Local Authority respondents- express the strongest agreement (fig 5).

Some similarities are identified with impacts experienced by other cohorts of children and young people, such as young carers. Respondents also highlight the complexity created by how an Armed Forces identity interacts with other elements of a young person's identity, such as additional learning or support needs. Despite noting this complexity, the majority of respondents agree that there is a distinctive impact for this cohort as a result of their experience as a member of an Armed Forces family.

Fig 5: Views on the extent to which the challenges and opportunities experienced by Armed Forces children are significantly different from those experienced by other groups of children and young people

The experiences of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups (n=171)



3.0 RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

REACH AND RESEARCH

Practitioners report ready access to quality resources, training, and research, but gaps remain, especially for early years and post-16 settings; priorities include expanding the reach of networking, resources for non-specialists, and research to data gaps.

• A majority of practitioners overall report that they are able to access high-quality resources, training and research evidence to support their work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel;

- There are notable differences in access to resources and support between practitioner subsets, with early years, university and college practitioners most likely to identify a gap in the current availability of resources and support;
- Opportunities for development include: producing resources designed for early years and post-16 age-groups; resources for non-specialist practitioners; increasing the reach and accessibility of facilitated networking opportunities; and research to address specific data gaps.

3.1 ACCESS TO RESOURCES

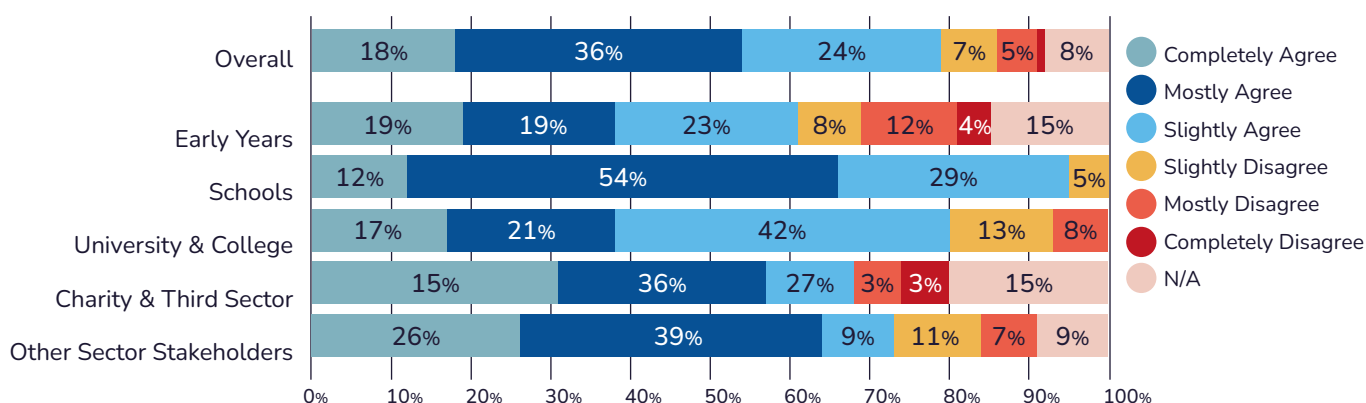
Practitioners identify availability of resources as a key strength of the sector (section 2.2), with 54% either completely or mostly agreeing that they are able to access high quality resources to support their work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel (fig 6).

Access to high-quality resources varies somewhat between practitioner subsets:

- Two-thirds of school and 'other sector stakeholder' respondents strongly agree that they are able to access high-quality resources;
- Access to high-quality resources for early years, universities and colleges is notably lower, with just 38% of respondents reporting strong agreement, though both groups were more likely to agree than disagree overall;
- Access to resources is not viewed as relevant to all practitioners, including 15% of those working in charities or early years. This likely reflects differences in the primary focus of these sector subgroups.

Fig 6: Access to resources to support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel

I am able to access the high-quality resources I need to support my work with this group of children and young people (n=170)



3.2 ACCESS TO SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Sector practitioners are more likely than not to be able to access relevant support or training, with 50% of respondents overall strongly agreeing that they are able to access high-quality support or training to strengthen their practice (fig 7).

Access to high-quality training varies somewhat between practitioner subsets:

- Two-thirds of school respondents strongly agree they are able to access high-quality support or training to strengthen practice with this cohort;
- A significant minority of respondents disagree that they are able to access high quality support or training, including 39% of early years respondents and 29% of university and college respondents.

3.3 ACCESS TO RESEARCH EVIDENCE

A growing evidence base is viewed by many practitioners to be a strength of the sector (section 2.4), with 54% of respondents strongly agreeing that they are able to access high quality research evidence (fig 8):

- School respondents are most likely of all practitioner subsets to strongly agree that they are able to access high-quality research evidence to support work with this cohort;
- Early years respondents are most likely of all practitioner subsets to disagree that they are able to access high-quality research evidence to support work with this cohort.

Fig 7: Access to support and training for work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel

I am able to access the high-quality support or training I need to strengthen my practice with this group of children and young people (n=170)

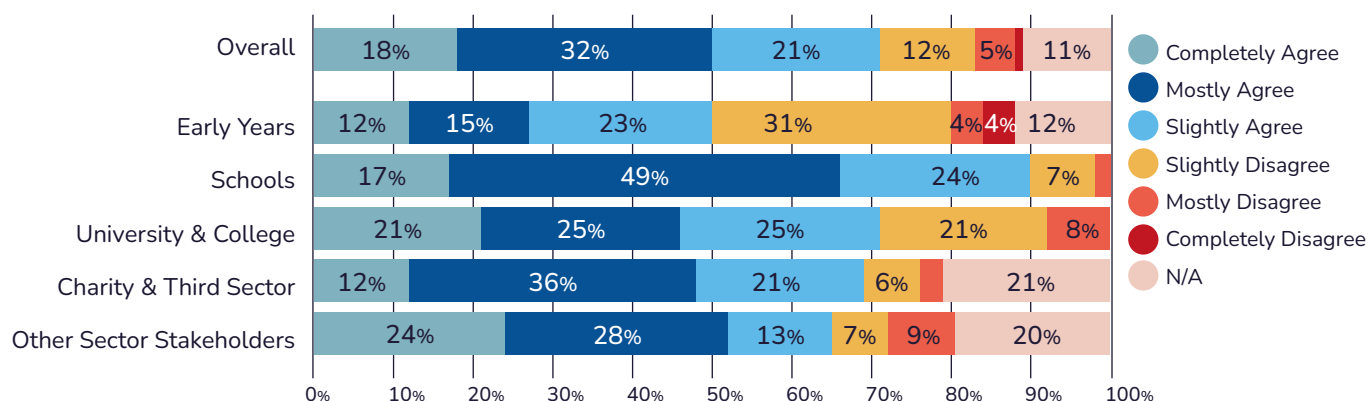
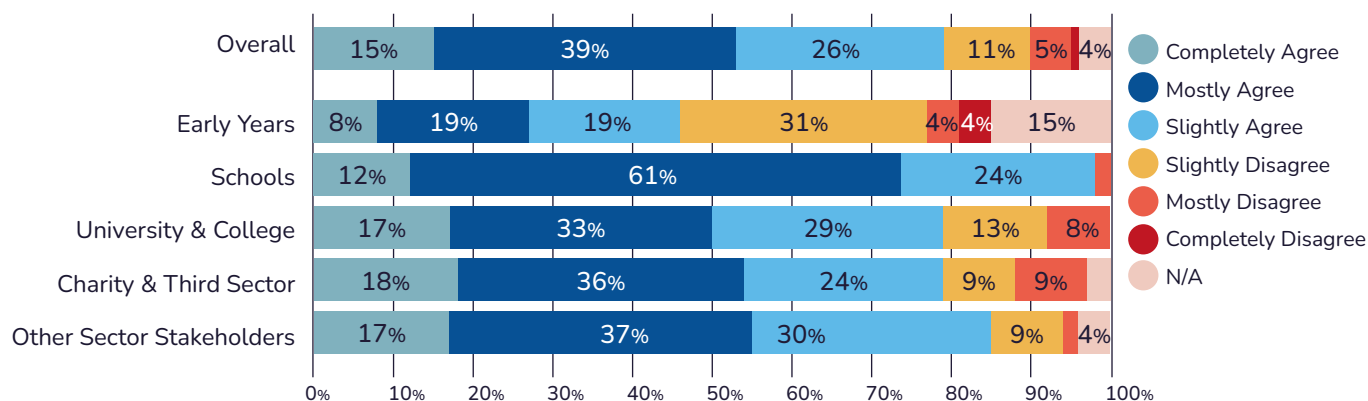


Fig 8: Access to research to support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel

I am able to access the high-quality research evidence I need to support my work with this group of children and young people (n=170)



3.4 RESOURCE AND SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Overall, a majority of practitioners report that they are able to access high-quality resources, training and research evidence to support their work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents completely agreeing with statements related to access to resources and support is typically lower than the proportion completely agreeing with the statements related to practitioner confidence. This indicates that there are opportunities for further strengthening access to support, training and research evidence.

The high volume of strong agreement combined with qualitative consultation data indicates that opportunities may be greatest in promoting awareness of, and access to, existing support, training and evidence. In addition, there are likely to be sector-specific training and evidence gaps that may require new assets to be developed, most notably for early years practitioners.

Questionnaire respondents and focus group participants identified three key areas where resources and support could be strengthened:

NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Opportunities to participate in networks and collaborate with like-minded professionals were highly valued. Suggestions were made for the extension of facilitated networking opportunities, with a focus on increasing reach and accessibility.

RESOURCES

Several respondents suggested that promotion of available resources was needed to increase awareness. Others suggested scope for development of additional resources, including:

- Resources designed for early years and post-16 age-groups;
- Resources that are more accessible for non-specialists, with some noting that existing resources were most suitable for cohort specialists, such as schools with large numbers of children from Armed Forces families;
- Creation of maintained directories of contacts, and information such as lists comparing support provided by different universities.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Suggested action to fill data gaps was identified as a way of further enhancing practice and policy by strengthening the evidence base, including:

- Longitudinal impact data;
- Post-16 outcomes;
- Greater prominence of the voice of children and young people within research.

4.0 FUNDING AND POLICY

SIGNIFICANT VARIATION

Opinions vary widely on the state of funding and policy support for professionals' work with Armed Forces children, with big differences both within and between practitioner groups; variations between national, devolved and local policy play a key role.

- *There is a significant range of opinions both within and between practitioner subgroups on the availability of funding to support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, indicating a range of experiences and/or expectations;*
- *There is also a range of opinions on the extent to which national policy supports work with this cohort, with similar levels of strong agreement and strong disagreement across all practitioner subgroups;*
- *Education is a devolved area of policy. This means that there are significant policy variations across the home nations, along with differences in the level of specific funding available for this cohort. Variation in the local interpretation and application of national policy was also noted;*
- *Overall, there would appear to be significant opportunities to improve access to funding and enhance the utility of policy related to the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.*

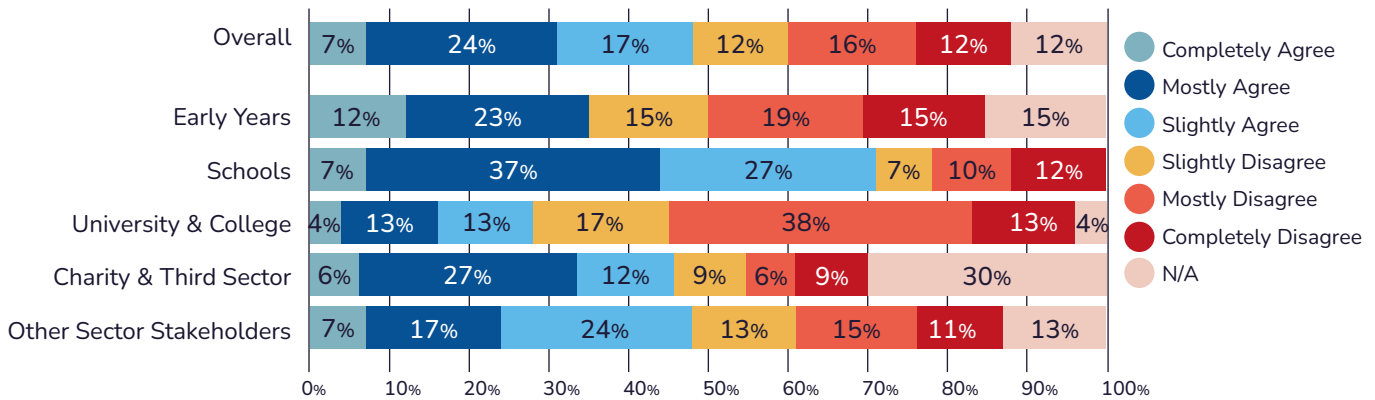
4.1 FUNDING

Practitioners have varying perspectives on the availability of funding. Overall, 31% of respondents strongly agree that they have access to sufficient funding to support their work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, with 28% strongly disagreeing (fig 9).

There is a significant range of responses both within and between subgroups, indicating a range of experiences and/or expectations:

- School respondents are most likely of all practitioner subgroups to agree that they have access to sufficient funding to support work with this cohort, but 29% of school respondents disagree that this is the case;
- University and college respondents are most likely to disagree that they have sufficient funding to support work with this cohort, with 51% strongly disagreeing. This perhaps reflects the small proportion of university and college respondents for whom this cohort of young people is a significant focus of their role (fig D);
- Almost one in three charity and third sector respondents say that access to funding is not relevant to their role;
- There are significant variations in the levels of specific funding available for this cohort across the home nations, due to devolved policy areas.



Fig 9: Access to funding to support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel*I have access to sufficient funding to support my work with this group of children and young people (n=170)*

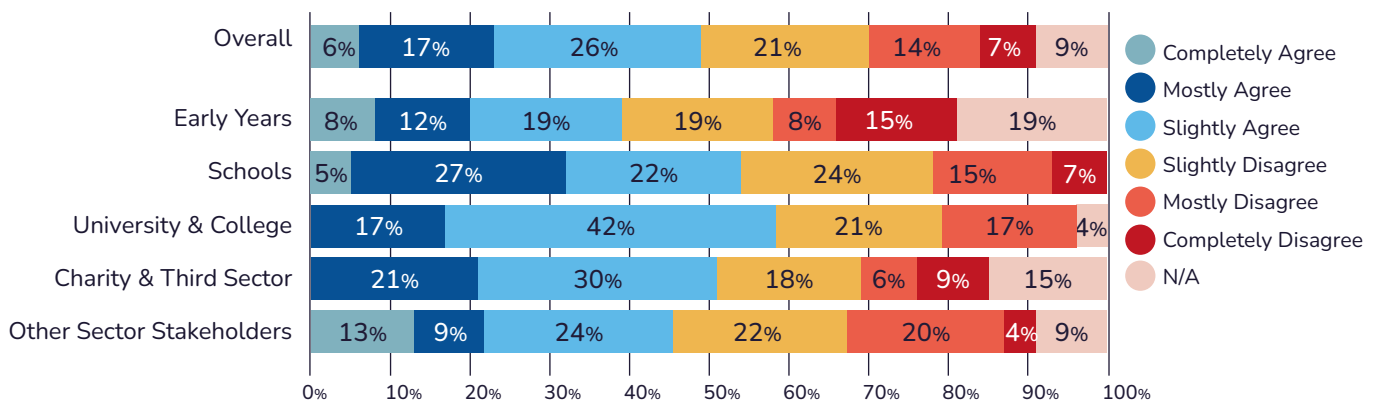
4.2 POLICY

Practitioners have varying perspectives on the extent to which national policy supports their work with this cohort. Overall, 23% of respondents strongly agree that national policy supports their work with this cohort, but 21% strongly disagree (fig 10). There is a similar pattern of responses across all practitioner subsets.

Education is a devolved area of policy, meaning there are

significant variations across the home nations, including in the definition used to identify the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.

There is also variation in the application of policy in practice, for example school respondents from England noted a range of experiences due to variations in local authority and NHS trust interpretations of, and perceived adherence to, national policy.

Fig 10: Respondent views on the extent to which national policy supports their work*I feel that national policy supports my work with this group of children and young people (n=170)*

5.0 KEY CHALLENGES

RESOURCE, DATA, POLICY

Practitioners face challenges including limited funding, policy gaps, data shortages, and balancing visibility with diversity, alongside complexities from devolved policy and the cohort's varied circumstances.

Practitioners identified challenges they face in relation to supporting the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. Key themes identified by questionnaire respondents and focus group participants were:

- *The availability of funding and other resources;*
- *Challenges related to the experiences, circumstances and characteristics of the cohort;*
- *Limited recognition of the cohort in national and local policy;*
- *Challenges related to the intersection of devolved and reserved policy;*
- *Significant gaps in data, in particular data related to outcomes;*
- *The tension between raising the visibility of the cohort as an identifiable group with specific opportunities and needs, and recognising the diversity of experiences and circumstances within the cohort that is needed to provide effective support to individuals.*

5.1 FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Practitioners most frequently identify limited dedicated funding or specific resources to support work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as their most significant challenge.

FINANCE

Many respondents noted limited and reducing funding as a significant challenge in providing the desired level of support and resources to support this cohort. Some noted the limited-term nature of much funding, which presents a challenge for sustainability and long-term impact. Some

school respondents from outside England expressed a desire for dedicated funding similar to the Service Pupil Premium that is available in England. Others suggested that this dedicated funding should be extended to younger and older age-groups.

●● *Lack of post-16 Service Pupil Premium - service children are lost in this important transition point, and do not get the additional support that they would benefit from."*

University widening participation

SERVICE PUPIL PREMIUM (SPP)

Many schools in England in receipt of SPP noted frustration at this being a significantly lower level of funding than the income related to Pupil Premium. Although schools with large numbers of Service children are able to fund dedicated support using SPP, for schools with low numbers of Service pupils, the funding available is often viewed as insufficient for achieving a meaningful impact. In addition, family expectations of how SPP should be used often do not align with school priorities or obligations, creating a source of tension.

●● *The service pupil premium is more than a thousand pounds less than PP but the outcomes gulf is similar."*

Primary school

FOCUS OF RESOURCES

Many respondents noted a significant increase in high-quality resources in recent years. However, this was not felt evenly across all sectors and cohort age-groups. Early years respondents were most likely to report a gap in the availability of suitable resources. Some secondary school respondents also noted a challenge in finding age-appropriate resources.

●● *A lack of resources and training for early years staff to support children of that age group with their self-regulation and feelings."*

Early years

●● *Lack of resources for secondary schools... especially on deployment and transition."*

Secondary school

5.2 COHORT CHALLENGES

Practitioners identified fundamental challenges experienced by many children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. Many relate to the impact of Armed Forces life, and have been regularly identified in previous research, including previous SCiP Alliance consultations.

IMPACT OF MOBILITY

Many children from Armed Forces families will experience moves around the UK and/or overseas. These moves disrupt education continuity and can have additional psychosocial impacts. Additional challenge is presented when moving between home nations and/or overseas due to devolved education policy, though curriculum variation is also experienced within home nations.

A further layer of challenge is experienced by those with additional health or learning/ support needs. Treatment or support plans tend to be determined using locally set criteria, and so typically do not follow the child. This leads to significant delays in the provision of treatment and support.

Although not all children from Armed Forces families experience mobility, and mobility is not uniquely experienced by this cohort, it is a key feature of Armed Forces life that creates significant challenges.

●● *Frequent relocations can disrupt learning and emotional stability, while deployments often lead to anxiety and behavioural changes."*

Local authority

●● *The struggles with SEND and ensuring that pupils have a fair chance when they are moving between counties, especially gathering information for those children with SEND."*

Primary school

IMPACT OF SEPARATION

Many families experience emotional and practical challenges when a serving family member is away on deployment.

●● *The big issues are around anxiety for family separation, deployments etc..."*

Charity

●● *Coping with deployment and children's emotions."*

Primary school

IDENTIFYING THE COHORT

Several respondents noted challenges in identifying this cohort in order to provide support. This was a particular challenge for schools with small numbers of children from Armed Forces families and/ or veteran families, as these families are often reluctant to make themselves known. Similarly, older age groups may be less inclined to identify themselves as from an Armed Forces family, creating challenges for colleges. Although the UCAS marker was viewed as a positive development in identifying those moving to university, it was noted that there is currently limited data on the impact that this has had.

●● *Identifying Service children is sometimes difficult due to inconsistent data, and their geographical spread across many schools makes coordinated support harder to deliver."*

Local authority

●● *Finding the students in school/the correct teachers to help identify them."*

University widening participation

5.3 POLICY CHALLENGES

Some respondents were strongly of the view that the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel remain largely unacknowledged in national and local policy. Although progress has been made with regards to targeted policy in some specific instances, such as recognition as an under-represented group in higher education, systemic challenges remain embedded within the wider policy environment. These are often viewed as failing to recognise or mitigate the specific impacts of Armed Forces life on the education and wellbeing of this cohort.

●● *Complete invisibility of this cohort in policy."*
 Charity

●● *Not enough government policy support."*
 Secondary school

APPLICATION OF POLICY TO LOCAL CONTEXTS

Variations in the application of national policy at local level by, for example, local authorities and NHS organisations creates what is viewed as a postcode lottery of support. Particular frustrations were expressed about variations in awareness and interpretation of the Armed Forces Covenant, with local practice often not meeting expectations generated by national policy statements.

●● *Difference of timescales and services between the different local authorities."*
 Primary school

●● *Lack of mandatory policy that would make the Covenant's principles be upheld."*
 Independent advisor

INTERACTION OF DEVOLVED AND RESERVED POLICY

Education and health are devolved matters for the home nations, and defence a reserved matter for the UK government. This creates systemic challenges where impacts of defence policy interact with other policy areas. Most prominent is the impact of mobility between home nations and/or overseas, as noted above.

●● *The differences in curriculum when children move between schools throughout the United Kingdom."*
 Primary school

●● *Differences in policy in English LAs and between England and devolved nations."*
 Charity

RECOGNITION OF COHORT

A large proportion of respondents from universities noted that children from Armed Forces families are typically a lower priority within higher education widening participation activities than they have been in recent years. With a small number of notable exceptions, work with this group is generally regarded as an 'extra' rather than a core priority by institutions.

●● *[Higher education] widening participation covers a large number of underrepresented groups and institutional structures do not always support intersectional approaches."*
 University widening participation

●● *It always seems to be that every year or two years or so, you say 'well we're going to switch our focus'... Service children I think sometimes they have focus and sometimes they'- I'm not saying an afterthought- but not at the forefront of thinking."*
 University widening participation

5.4 DATA CHALLENGES

Practitioners identified a number of data gaps, alongside acknowledging recent positive developments in the data available to understand the needs and evaluate outcomes for the children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. Gaps include limited data on intersectional needs, outcomes for the cohort, and limited examples of young people's voice within research.

●● *Gaps in current evidence and data."*

Funding body

●● *Insufficient data collection, and therefore analysis, to adequately understand needs and evaluate outcomes for the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, and tailor policy recommendations for support accordingly."*

Charity

5.5 DIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Some practitioners noted that considering the children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as a single group risks masking significant diversity. Variations in need and opportunity were suggested to be linked to several factors, including the branch of the UK Armed Forces in which the parent serves, the parent's rank, and interaction with personal characteristics such as neurodiversity.

●● *We have to look at the individual child to be able to meet their needs... Army compared to RAF compared to Navy but then actually even within those groups their experiences are going to be so different depending on what the serving person, what they're job role is and what their day-to-day life looks like."*

University widening participation



6.0 SECTOR TRENDS

A MATURING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Practitioner confidence and resource access have improved, supported by growing awareness, policy progress, and inclusion of young voices; local application of national policy and long-standing cohort challenges mean system-level issues persist.

- Comparisons with previous SCiP Alliance community consultations indicate a trend of increasing practitioner confidence and increasing access to high-quality resources;
- Practitioners note beneficial developments in some areas of challenge, showing a positive direction of travel despite ongoing challenges. Examples include:
 - an increasing awareness among some local service providers of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as a cohort with distinct needs;
 - some national policy developments that acknowledge the cohort;
 - a growing evidence base of quality research;
 - an increased focus on including children and young people in planning and decision making;
- Core underlying challenges remain, in particular those related to mobility, support for additional needs, inconsistent application of national policy by local providers, and the interaction of devolved and reserved policy areas.



6.1 INCREASED PRACTITIONER CONFIDENCE ²

Overall practitioner confidence relating to work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel has increased in each SCiP Alliance community consultation undertaken since 2018.

- The confidence of university and college respondents in understanding the advantages (fig 11) and challenges (fig 12) experienced by members of the cohort has increased at each consultation, despite remaining lower than for other practitioner subgroups;
- The confidence of school respondents in understanding advantages and challenges has also increased over time, as has their confidence in supporting the cohort to make informed choices about their future education and careers (fig 13);
- The confidence of charity and other stakeholders was the highest of all subgroups in 2018, and has remained consistently high over time.

² To aid clarity, the charts in this section combine 'Completely Agree' and 'Mostly Agree' to form 'Strongly Agree'; and combine 'Mostly Disagree' and 'Completely Disagree' to form 'Strongly Disagree'. Percentages are calculated from respondents providing an active response to each statement, with those answering N/A removed. The reported subgroups are those used in previous years.

Fig 11: Comparison of practitioner confidence understanding cohort advantages in 2018, 2022 and 2025

I am confident that I understand the advantages that many of these children and young people identify as a result of their experience

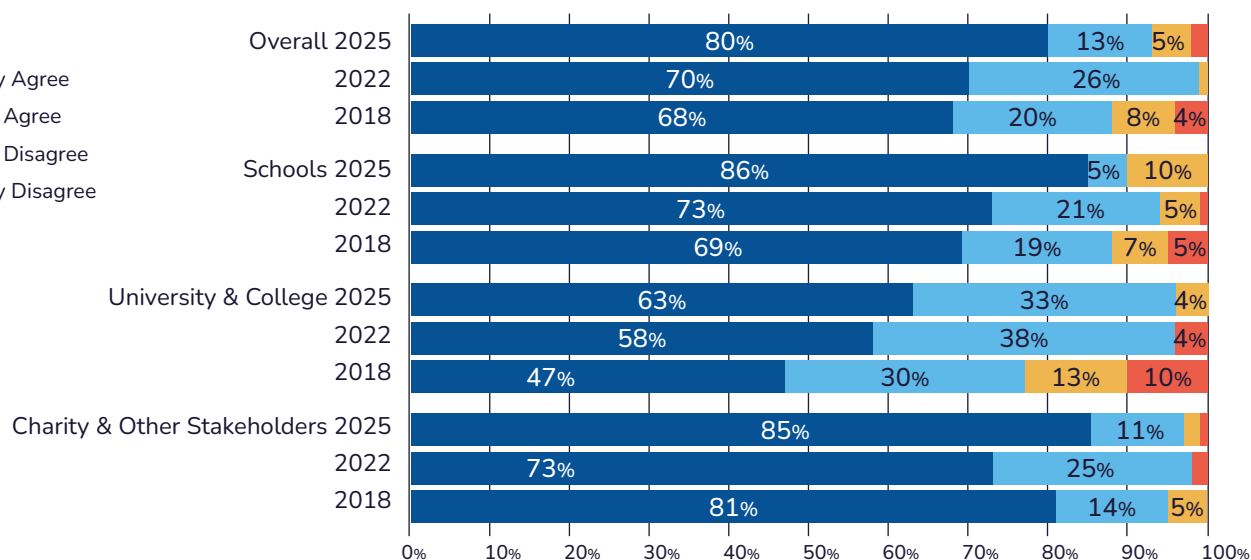


Fig 12: Comparison of practitioner confidence understanding cohort challenges in 2018, 2022 and 2025

I am confident that I understand the challenges experienced by many of these children and young people

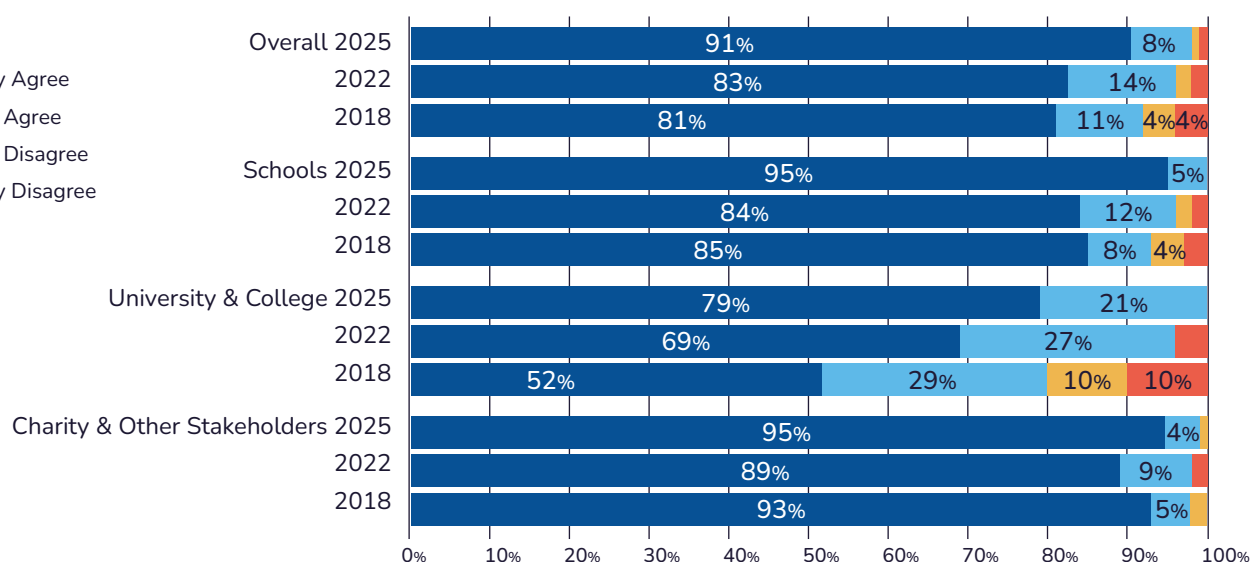
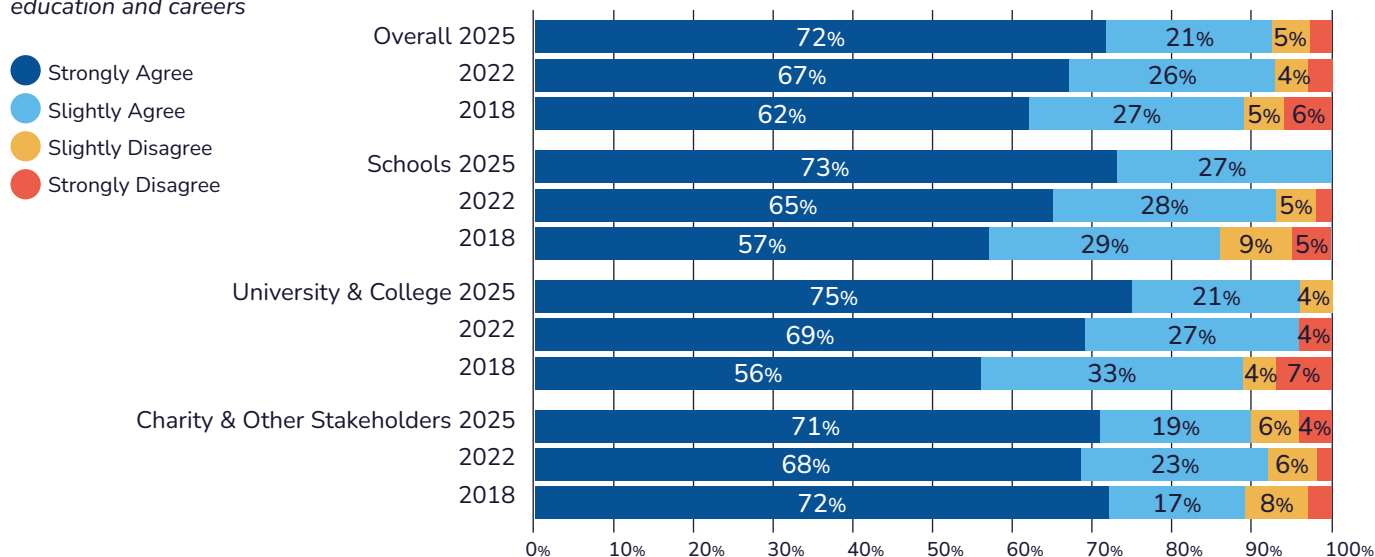


Fig 13: Comparison of practitioner confidence supporting informed choices about future education and careers in 2018, 2022 and 2025

I am confident about supporting this group of children and young people to make informed choices about their future education and careers



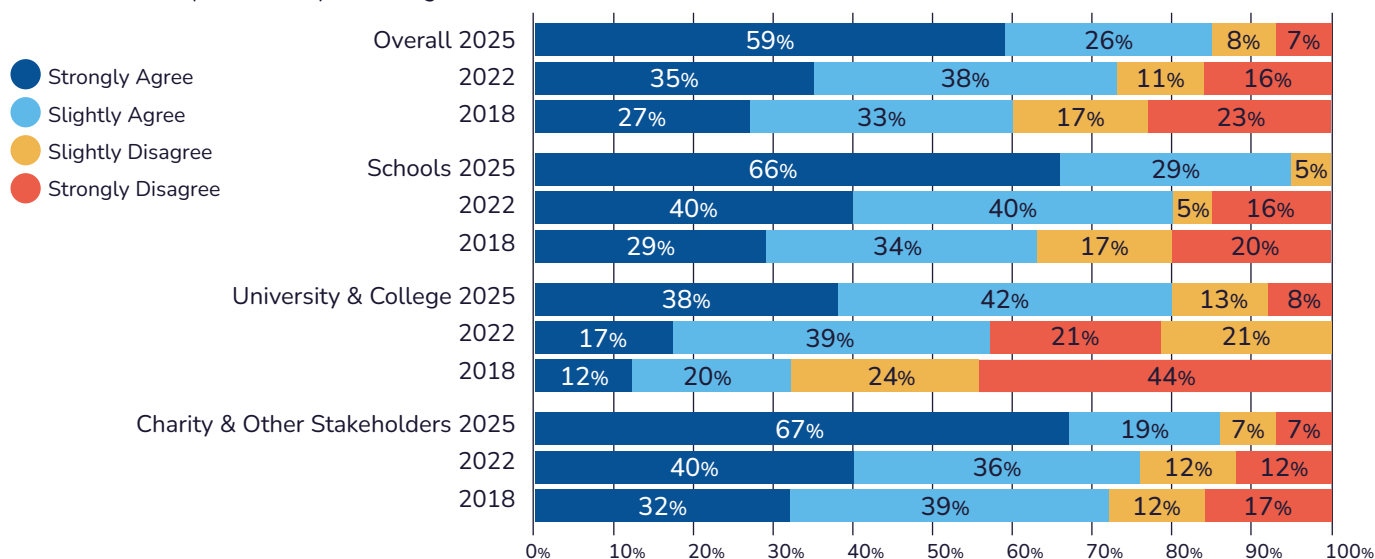
6.2 IMPROVED ACCESS TO RESOURCES

There is a notable increase over time of the proportion of respondents from all sectors strongly agreeing that they are able to access appropriate resources (fig 14). An increased range of high-quality resources was noted by many respondents, in particular those working in schools.

This improved access to resources is substantial, though a change in the wording of the question means that caution must be exercised when interpreting the scale of improvement. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates a significant and sustained increase in the availability of high-quality resources to support work with this cohort. Some gaps remain, mostly commonly for university and college respondents.

Fig 14: Comparison of practitioner access to resources in 2018, 2022 and 2025

I am able to access the high quality resources I need to support my work with this group of children and young people (2025)
Whenever I have looked for resources to support children and young people from Armed Forces families, it has been easy to find what I need (2018/2022) excluding N/A



6.3 BENEFICIAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AREAS OF CHALLENGE

Areas of challenge identified by practitioners have been similar across all SCiP Alliance community consultations. However, there are several areas in which practitioners note beneficial developments, indicating a positive direction of travel even where underlying challenges remain:

- **Growing evidence base:** a growing body of research, contributing to evidence-based practice and policy development;
- **Increasing awareness:** increasing visibility and recognition of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel as a cohort with distinct needs. Positive examples include a growing professional awareness among local service providers, and national policy developments such as formal recognition as an under-represented group in higher education;
- **Increased voice:** an increased focus on including children and young people in planning and decision making.



6.4 PERSISTING UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

Many of the challenges outlined in section 6 have been identified consistently in all SCiP Alliance consultations since 2018. Section 7.3 notes positive progress identified by practitioners in some areas. Nevertheless, core underlying challenges remain:

- **Mobility and separation:** these key features of Armed Forces life for many families are the most frequently identified challenge. Although practitioners identify increased awareness and understanding of these challenges, no significant structural changes have been identified that prevent or mitigate the negative impact experienced by some children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel. This includes the significant challenges experienced in relation to supporting children and young people with additional learning, support or health needs. Practitioners continue to identify the cohort as significantly disadvantaged compared to other children and young people with additional learning or support needs.
- **Devolved and reserved policy:** education is a devolved policy area, meaning that the experiences, opportunities and challenges of the cohort vary across the home nations. Defence is a reserved policy area, and challenges are experienced where this intersects with devolved policy areas, as the context of policy impact is different across home nations and for those Armed Force families currently stationed overseas. Practitioners report the greatest challenges where there is mobility between home nations and/or overseas; but there is also a tension between devolved and reserved policy areas where UK-wide programmes do not take full account of the devolved policy context. This is a core structural challenge that practitioners have reported consistently, and for which little tangible change had been identified.
- **Local application of national policy:** in addition to variations of experience attributed to devolved policy, practitioners identify challenges relating to the inconsistent interpretation and application of national policy by local providers (see section 6.3). Practitioners report frustration with local barriers that are not experienced in other areas, and note the additional challenge for mobile families. This is a core structural challenge for which positive developments have not been identified.

7.0 SECTOR PRIORITIES WHOLE-SYSTEM SOLUTIONS

Professionals call for systemic improvements, including: policy solutions for mobility and healthcare, greater national awareness, stronger support for networking and collaboration, closing data gaps, and a focus on meaningful, measurable impact.

Analysis of questionnaire and focus group data identified the following sector priorities for resource or policy changes. These reflect practitioner views on the changes that will have the most positive impact on work with the children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel:

- **Policy solutions to core challenges**, in particular those related to mobility and/or access to healthcare or support for additional needs, and the interaction of devolved and reserved policy;
- **Raising awareness** among service providers unfamiliar with the cohort;
- **More funding and resources**, including enhanced networks and opportunities to collaborate;
- **Addressing data gaps**, including longitudinal impact data, post-16 outcomes, and giving greater prominence to the voice of children and young people within research;
- **A focus on impact**, with priorities selected to create positive change.

7.1 POLICY SOLUTIONS TO CORE CHALLENGES

A large proportion of practitioners, especially school respondents, suggested a need for policy responses to core challenges, particularly those related to mobility. Examples include:

- a UK-wide approach to supporting mobility, recognising how movement of families interacts with education, and specifying measures to reduce negative impacts and ease transition;
- a clear and enforced policy regarding access to healthcare and support for additional needs, with measures to eliminate the disadvantage experienced by those who are returned to the bottom of an assessment or treatment waiting list following a move;
- identifying the opportunities and navigating the challenges of the intersection of devolved and reserved policy, to enable effective UK-wide work;
- increasing awareness of, and adherence to, the Armed Forces Covenant to provide a consistent experience for Armed Forces families.

7.2 RAISING AWARENESS AMONG SERVICE PROVIDERS

Limited understanding of the cohort among providers of services accessed by children and young people is viewed as a key challenge. Respondents suggested a need for training and resources to increase the wider understanding of this cohort among service providers. Examples included:

- Training tailored for teachers in schools with low numbers of children from Armed Forces families;
- Training for health professionals, and providers of social support.

7.3 FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Practitioners identified a need for more funding to target support where needed, including long-term funding where appropriate.

Section 4.4 identified resource and support development requests. This includes increased promotion of available resources, and development of additional resources such as:

- Resources designed for early years and post-16 age-groups;
- Resources that are more accessible for non-specialists, such as schools with large numbers of children from Armed Forces families;
- Creation of maintained directories of contacts, and information such as lists of support available from universities;
- Extension of facilitated networking opportunities, with a focus on increasing reach and accessibility.

7.4 ADDRESSING DATA GAPS

Practitioners identified several data gaps. Action to fill these gaps would enhance the evidence base, that could then be used to enhance practice and policy. These include:

- Longitudinal impact data;
- Post-16 outcomes;
- Giving greater prominence to the voice of children and young people in research.

7.5 A FOCUS ON IMPACT

Practitioners highlight the need to focus on sustained positive impact for children and young people. Some frustration was expressed at the slow pace of progress. It was suggested that priorities should be informed by what is most likely to create positive change, in order to deliver positive impact for the children of serving or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel.



APPENDIX A - METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

This report has been compiled using primary data collected between May and August 2025. A mixed-methods research design combined a breadth of responses from an online questionnaire with stakeholder focus groups to explore qualitative themes in more depth:

- **Online questionnaire:** a core questionnaire comprised of Likert-type rating scales and free text response questions (see Appendix B). The questionnaire was promoted by the SCiP Alliance staff team and partner organisations through professional networks. A total of 180 usable responses were received between May and July 2025.
- **Stakeholder focus groups:** a total of 30 stakeholders took part in either a one-to-one or small group online interview. Participants represented a range of perspectives, including Early Years, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, University Widening Participation, Researchers, Independent Advisors, Local Authorities, Charity and Third Sector, and the MOD. Participants were recruited from Scotland, Wales and different English regions, with others undertaking roles that were UK-wide and/or overseas. A semi-structured topic guide was used to explore key themes in more depth. Focus groups were recorded with permission, and transcribed in an intelligent verbatim format prior to analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics were produced for the quantitative questionnaire responses. Reported percentages are based on the number of responses received to the relevant question. Five subsets were constructed to enable comparison between key groups:

- **Early Years:** Nurseries; Childminders;
- **Schools:** Primary School or Academy; Secondary School or Academy; All through School or Academy; Special School;
- **University & College:** Further Education College; University- Widening Participation or Outreach; University- Student Services;
- **Charity & Third Sector**

- **Other Sector Stakeholders:** MOD; Local Authority; UK or Devolved Government; Researchers; Private Sector Providers; Funding Bodies; Other.

Qualitative data from free-text questionnaire responses and interviews were analysed to identify key themes. These themes were not pre-determined, but were developed during analysis of the data set.

PROFILE OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS

The analysed sample of 180 responses represented a broad range of stakeholder perspectives. Responses were received from all UK regions, including 12% from the devolved nations and 19% from practitioners with UK-wide roles. The sample provided a good balance of sector representation (fig A) and professional roles and perspectives:

- The majority of respondents had roles related to supporting the children of serving and/or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel (fig B). This was true for all stakeholder groups except for University and College respondents, who were most likely to have a role promoting access to education and future careers;
- Just under a fifth of respondents overall were an Armed Forces family member in addition to their work or volunteer role (fig B). This was higher for charity and other sector stakeholders, and significantly lower for University and College respondents;
- Around half of respondents had a role undertaking regular direct work with children or young people, with 38% undertaking management or strategy roles. However, the nature of respondent roles varied significantly between sectors (fig C);
- The proportion of time spent on work related to the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel varied significantly by sector (fig D). Charity and other sector stakeholders were most likely to have a role where this cohort were a specific focus, whereas 63% of University and College respondents said that work focussed on this group makes up less than 10% of their time.

The respondent sample provides a broad range of perspectives reflecting the diversity of those engaged with the SCiP Alliance, though we are unable to assess the extent to which the sample is representative of all those whose work is related to this cohort of children and young people.

Fig A: Sector representation of online questionnaire respondents

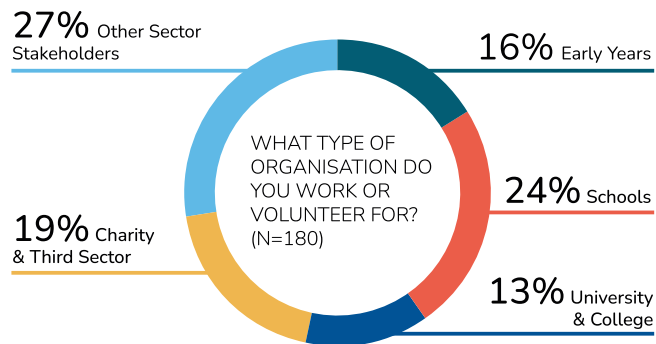


Fig B: Viewpoint of online questionnaire respondents by sector

Which of these describes you (please tick all that apply)?
(n=180)

- A professional volunteer whose role involves supporting the children of serving and/or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel
- A professional volunteer whose role involves promoting access to education and future careers
- An Armed Forces family member

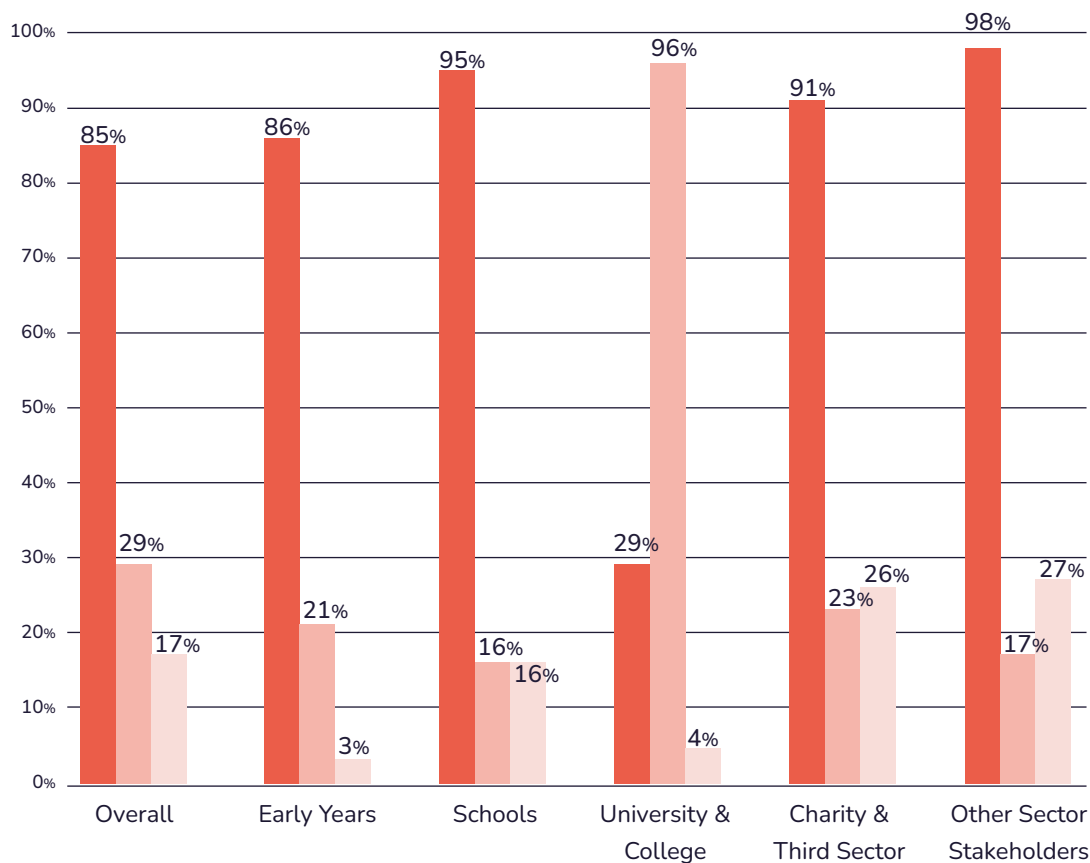


Fig C: Role of online questionnaire respondents by sector

What is the nature of your role (you may choose more than one)?(n=180)

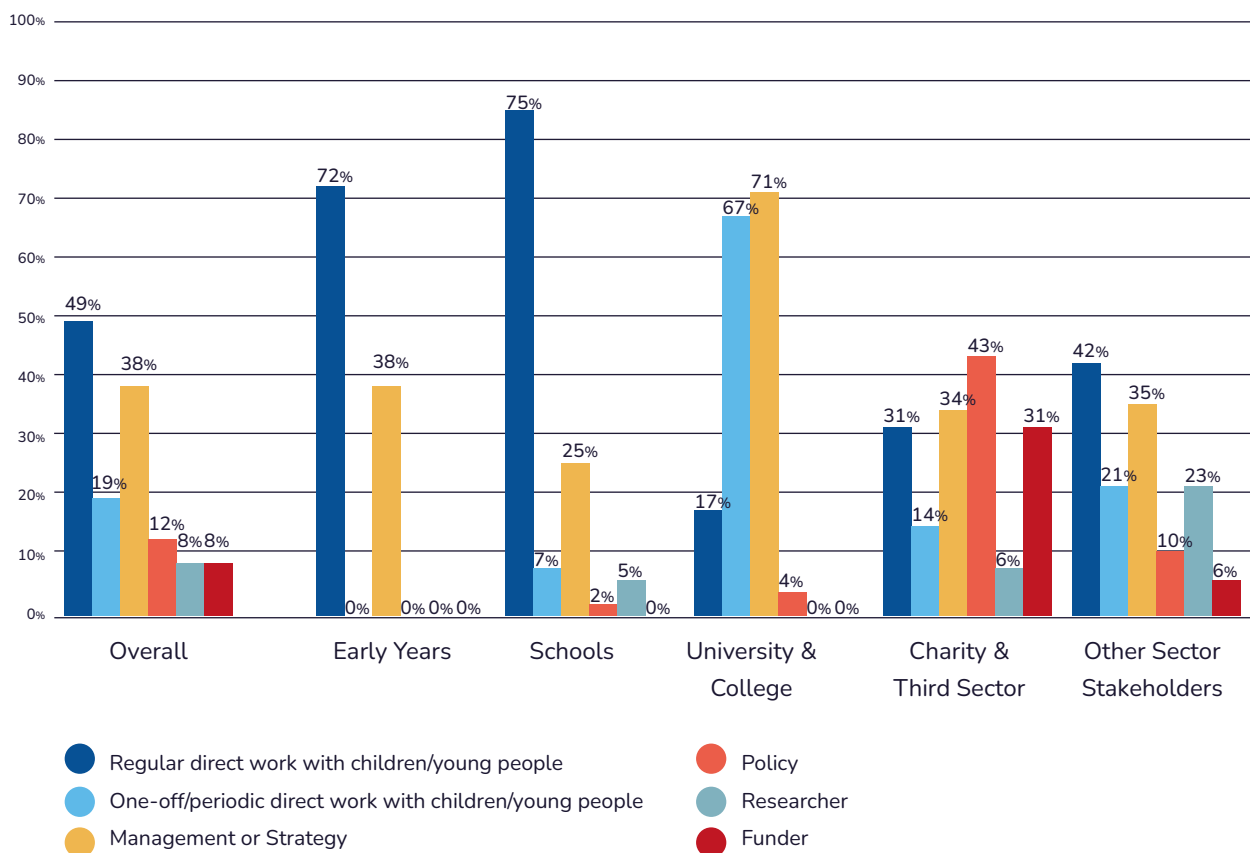
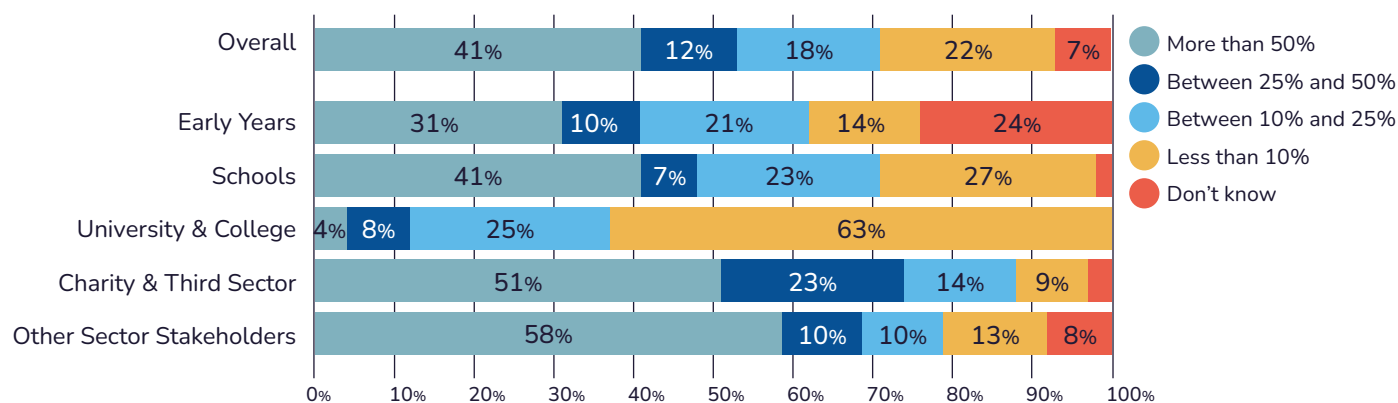


Fig D: Proportion of working or volunteering time spent on work related to the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel by sector

Approximately what proportion of your working or volunteering time do you spend on work related to the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel? (n=180)



APPENDIX B - QUESTIONNAIRE

This appendix provides the wording of questions detailed in this report.

Which of these describes you (please tick all that apply)?

- ☐ A professional or volunteer whose role involves supporting the children of serving and/or ex-UK Armed Forces personnel
- ☐ A professional or volunteer whose role involves promoting access to education and future careers
- ☐ An Armed Forces family member

What type of organisation do you work or volunteer for?

- ☐ MOD
- ☐ Education (Early Years, School, College)
 - ☐ Early Years
 - ☐ Primary School or Academy
 - ☐ Secondary School or Academy
 - ☐ All through School or Academy
 - ☐ Special School
 - ☐ Alternative school provision/ PRU
 - ☐ Sixth Form College
 - ☐ Further Education College
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ University - Widening Participation
- ☐ University - Student Services
- ☐ University - Research
- ☐ Local Authority
- ☐ Charity or Third Sector
- ☐ UK or Devolved Government
- ☐ Funding Body
- ☐ Private Sector Provider
- ☐ Other (please specify)

What is the nature of your role (you may choose more than one)?

- ☐ Regular direct work with children/young people (e.g. teacher, youth worker, pastoral support)
- ☐ One-off/periodic direct work with children/young people (e.g. therapeutic practitioner, widening participation coordinator)
- ☐ Management or Strategy (e.g. headteacher, charity service manager, local authority officer)
- ☐ Policy (e.g. charity campaigns coordinator, policy advisor)
- ☐ Researcher
- ☐ Funder
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Where does your work mainly take place?

- ☐ England
 - ☐ East of England
 - ☐ East Midlands
 - ☐ London
 - ☐ North East England
 - ☐ North West England
 - ☐ South East England
 - ☐ South West England
 - ☐ West Midlands
 - ☐ Yorkshire and the Humber
 - ☐ England-wide
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
- ☐ Northern Ireland
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ Wales
- ☐ UK-wide
- ☐ Overseas
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Approximately what proportion of your working or volunteering time do you spend on work related to the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Less than 10%
- ☐ Between 10% and 25%
- ☐ Between 25% and 50%
- ☐ More than 50%
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ It varies (please explain)

Thinking about your work with the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response Options:

- ☐ Completely Agree
- ☐ Mostly Agree
- ☐ Slightly Agree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Mostly Disagree
- ☐ Completely Disagree
- ☐ N/A

Items:

- I am confident that I understand the advantages that many of these children and young people identify as a result of their experience
- I am confident that I understand the challenges experienced by many of these children and young people
- I am confident about supporting the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel to thrive
- I am confident about supporting this group of children and young people to make informed choices about their future education and careers
- The experiences of the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel can have an impact on their education that is significantly different from the challenges and opportunities experienced by other groups
- I am able to access the high quality resources I need to support my work with this group of children and young people

- I am able to access the high quality support or training I need to strengthen my practice with this group of children and young people
- I am able to access the high quality research evidence I need to support my work with this group of children and young people
- I have access to sufficient funding to support my work with this group of children and young people
- I feel that national policy supports my work with this group of children and young people

What are the things that help you most in supporting the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel?

[Free Response]

What are the main challenges you face, in relation to supporting the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel?

[Free Response]

Thinking about the overall support available for the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel, what in your opinion is currently working well?

[Free Response]

What resource and/or policy changes would most help you in your current role to enable the children of serving and ex-UK Armed Forces personnel to thrive?

[Free Response]

In your opinion, what resource and/or policy changes would have the most positive impact for children and young people from serving or ex-UK Armed Forces families?

[Free Response]



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