

Service Children's Progression



UNDER THE RADAR

SERVICE CHILDREN AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

PROFESSOR GRAEME ATHERTON

DR LIAM SATCHELL

THRIVING LIVES
FOR SERVICE
CHILDREN

The Service Children's Progression
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FOREWORD

This report marks a new chapter in the state of Service children's access and participation in higher education in England. Alongside a step-change in regulation, it provides an invaluable synthesis of the rationale and priorities for action, while new analysis underpins proposals key to unlocking practice that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and young people from Armed Forces families.

Among many other powerful insights, it highlights a possible stalling of progress in the scale of support for Service children and makes concrete proposals to help buck this trend.

Importantly, this report responds directly to the Office for Students' new approach to regulating higher education access and participation, incorporating the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register. The EORR represents a significant opportunity for Service children's engagement in higher education. The risk-based approach – as opposed to the generalised cohort-level approach that has characterised prior regulation – has the potential to respond in more nuanced ways to the well-evidenced and highly complex diversity of experiences within the Service child cohort.

I am delighted that we have been able to respond swiftly to add much-needed evidence – and systematic and thoughtful analysis – to the work undertaken by the Office for Students in creating the first iteration of the EORR. In doing so, we seek to bring into full view of the whole sector the lives and support needs of Service children, who like many minority groups distributed widely throughout the communities in which universities work, risk being lost below everyone's radar.



PHILIP DENT
DIRECTOR

Service Children's Progression Alliance

SERVICE CHILDREN'S PROGRESSION ALLIANCE

The SCiP Alliance works for a vision of thriving lives for Service children. 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.

The SCiP Alliance includes a UK-wide Hub Network of 12 Hubs, hosted by 21 partners and connecting over 800 professionals working to do together – for Service children – what they could not do alone. To date, an online resource bank has supported over 23,000 users and there have been more than 1,800 downloads from the research repository, while the Thriving Lives Toolkit – a continuous improvement tool for schools developed with funding and support from a collaboration of Uni Connect partnerships – now supports schools throughout the UK and is rated highly by 84% of users. The SCiP Alliance's diverse community, resources and tools have been supplemented by over 178 events focused on improving the scale and quality of support for Service children.

THE SCiP ALLIANCE IS GENEROUSLY HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER AND SUPPORTED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE.

NATIONAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES NETWORK (NEON)

The National Education Opportunities Network is the professional organisation for widening access to higher education in England. Formed in 2012, it has over 150 organisations as members including over 100 universities. NEON delivers professional development to over 1,000 colleagues across the United Kingdom.

PROFESSOR GRAEME ATHERTON

Professor Graeme Atherton is the Director of the National Education Opportunities Network. He is also the Head of the Centre for Inequality and Levelling Up (CIELUP) and a Parliamentary Research Fellow in the House of Commons Library.

DR LIAM SATCHELL

Dr Liam Satchell is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Winchester. He is an expert in methodology and individual differences and has a particular focus on making applications of psychology more useful (to school, legal outcomes, and others).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This report was commissioned by the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP Alliance) which connects educational leaders and practitioners working to improve the life chances of children and young people in Armed Forces families. It supports them with collaborative tools and a growing evidence base and is hosted by the University of Winchester.

It will outline the present situation where access to higher education for Service children in England is concerned and a future road map that can enhance access for this group. It will examine the relationship between Service children and higher education at present. In particular, it will examine the implications of the decision by the Office for Students not to include Service children in the first iteration of its Equal Opportunities Risk Register (EORR) launched in 2022 which 'identifies 12 sector-wide risks that may affect a student's opportunity to access and succeed in higher education'.

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on academic and additional published research, analysis and data produced by the Department for Education and others on the educational performance of Service children; over 100 Access and Participation plans produced by higher education providers in England; findings from a sample of 20 members of the National Education Opportunities Network and feedback from consultation with higher education providers and Uni Connect partnerships.

KEY FINDINGS

- Service children face 5 major challenges where access to higher education is concerned:
 - Service children as a group experience a higher degree of mobility than those without a serving parent which impacts on attainment and pastoral support received.
 - Separation from the serving parent due to military duties can impact negatively on educational engagement, well-being and mental health.
 - Differences by socio-economic background exist within the cohort but more data is needed to understand these differences.
 - The unique nature of Service children's progression to adulthood poses challenges for the school system in providing adequate support for them.
 - Service children with disabilities and/or those who are young carers face additional issues in terms of educational attainment and progression, but more data and evidence is needed here.
- Service children are clustered in certain areas but also spread thinly across the UK with the most common numbers of Service children in any individual school with Service children being 1 pupil. Of all the schools who have pupils in receipt of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP), 40% of the secondary schools had only 1 pupil and 80% of primary schools only 1 pupil.
- Based on the Department for Education's definition of a Service child, since 2017-18 – the gap in higher education progression between Service children and their peers has increased to 5%.
- Of the 116 Access and Participation Plans (APPs) examined 75% do not reference any existing work or intended work with Service children. The number of providers focusing on Service children in their APPs over the last 3 years has decreased by 10%.
- All the 29 Uni Connect partnerships have a Service children population large enough to enable viable collaborative widening access work to be delivered. Only 5 partnerships have fewer than 500 Service children at secondary school-level in their area.
- Service children's experiences present risks pertinent to four of the risks in the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR). Further research is required to adequately assess the relevance of the remaining eight risks in the EORR to Service children's experiences. The diagram below summarises how the risks relate to Service children drawing on the evidence outlined in sections 4 to 6 of this report.



DIAGRAM 3: HOW SERVICE CHILDREN FIT IN THE EORR

EORR RISK	HOW IT RELATES TO SERVICE CHILDREN
RISK 1: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their expectations and ambitions. Factors that influence this can include (but are not limited to) a student's home circumstances, the school that they attend or the area where they live.	As shown in Table 1, Service children have higher rates of family mobility than non-Service children which can lead to a fall in attainment of at least 15% at GCSE. Separation can make developing higher education knowledge/skills difficult, and careers support inconsistent leading to Service children not having equal opportunities to work with parents on future choices. A product of Service children not having the equal opportunity to develop knowledge and skills is a 5% gap in participation in higher education between non-Service children and their peers. The disruption to education and opportunities can be particularly pronounced for mobile Service children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
RISK 2: INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their higher education options.	The school sector has found it difficult to support Service children to the level they would like to, which impacts on the ability of learners to make informed choices about higher education options. Mobility is likely to impact on the consistent receipt of information and guidance. Separation may impact on students' capacity to plan for the future and make informed choices. Outside of small pockets of concentration, Service children are spread very thinly, most commonly being the only Service child in a school meaning tailored information/guidance and support can be a challenge.
RISK 3: PERCEPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.	The majority (75% in our analysis) of higher education providers do not recognise the needs of Service children in their Access and Participation Plans. This lack of recognition and visibility may mean Service children perceive a limited range of higher education providers as open to them. Mobility may limit or disrupt the continuity of widening access/outreach support provided to Service children hampering their ability to consider the full range of course and providers for which they are qualified.
RISK 5: LIMITED CHOICE OF COURSE TYPE AND DELIVERY MODE Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types. Regional differences in the availability of types of higher education courses and the mode of course delivery that are offered may result in some groups of students not being able to attend a course of their choice.	Over half of Service children are resident in less than 10% of local authorities. Students are most likely to study in their home region, so the concentration of Service children in certain areas of the country may limit choices for the group pushing them toward a narrow range of institutions and, therefore, courses. Service children are also more likely to be young carers which may also restrict their course options to those in their home region only.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS

1. Update the EORR to include Service children in relation to risks 1, 2, 3 and 5 before the guidance for wave 2 of Access and Participation Plans is issued in early 2024.
2. Share the methodology underlying the construction of the EORR after wave 1 of Access and Participation Plans are reviewed in late 2023.
3. Establish a specific role for Uni Connect partnerships to support collaboration in support of Service children from 2024-25 onwards.
4. Strengthen guidance for Access and Participation plans to be submitted in 2024 to give greater emphasis to smaller numerical groups, including Service children.
5. Undertake work on the intersection between background characteristics of Service children, including socio-economic background, and their progression to higher education in 2024.

FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

6. Work with partners to produce a new annual publication looking at progress in supporting progression to higher education of Service children to be launched in 2024.
7. Follow the lead of other major employers across the public and private sectors and undertake exploratory work on collecting data on the socio-economic background of Armed Forces personnel in 2024.

FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

8. Undertake exploratory work on collecting data on the regional distribution of Service children studying at Key Stage 5/Level 3 from 16-19 in 2024.
9. Extend the Service Pupil Premium to those studying at Key Stage 5/Level 3 aged 16-19 from 2024.



1 INTRODUCTION:

A NEW APPROACH TO WIDENING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Inequalities in access remain one of the most high-profile issues in higher education¹. Who enters and succeeds and those who do not has been a concern of governments since the late 1990s. The present government has challenged some of the ideas surrounding the value of extending access to higher education. But it remains committed to extending access to under-represented groups and it is one of the priorities of the higher education regulator in England – the Office for Students. One of the features of the widening access agenda over the past 20 plus years has been a more nuanced understanding of the characteristics of those who are under-represented in higher education. Socio-economic background remains an underlying explanation for differences in participation and while progress has been made gaps between those from different socio-economic backgrounds remain large². Alongside those from lower socio-economic backgrounds other groups have been added including young carers and those from Gypsy, Romany and Traveller Communities as well as Service children/children from military families. The challenges this group faces due the unique nature of military life were recognized by the public body then responsible for access to higher education – the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). The recognition of Service children, defined by the SCiP 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’³ precipitated the beginning of a range of activities to support the access to higher education of this group of young people England.

In 2023 a new approach to widening access to higher education was introduced by the Office for Students (OfS). This new approach encourages higher education providers to identify the challenges to access and participation in their own specific context, to be informed by the OfS Equal

●● while progress has been made gaps between those from different socio-economic backgrounds remain large.

Opportunities Risk Register (EORR) which ‘identifies 12 sector-wide risks that may affect a student’s opportunity to access and succeed in higher education.’ The EORR is not designed to be exhaustive of all risks to equality of opportunity in higher education. Armed Forces family is named as a characteristic that higher education providers may consider pertinent to their work, but Service children are not specified as a group affected by any of the 12 sector-wide risks in the EORR⁴.

This report will outline the present situation where access to higher education for Service children is concerned and a future road map that can enhance access for this group. It will examine the relationship between Service children and higher education at present and implications of the approach taken by the higher education regulator. The level of engagement with Service children across the higher education sector will be reviewed as well as data regarding their distribution across England. Service children are part of a community in society for whom individual welfare is placed behind the common good. They deserve the opportunities to benefit from higher education that their peers enjoy. This report aims to contribute to ensuring these opportunities are embedded in what the higher education system offers.

This report was commissioned by the Service Children’s Progression Alliance (SCiP Alliance) which connects educational leaders and practitioners working to improve the life chances of children and young people in Armed Forces families. It supports them with collaborative tools and a growing evidence base, and is hosted by the University of Winchester.

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¹Department for Education (2020) Universities Minister calls for true social mobility - <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/universities-minister-calls-for-true-social-mobility>

²Department for Education (2023) Widening participation in higher education: 2023 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/widening-participation-in-higher-education-2023>

³For more information: <https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page/the-context-for-service-children>

⁴For more information: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/how-to-use-the-risk-register/>

2 HOW IS THE REPORT STRUCTURED?

This report draws upon data from a range of sources. Using a multi method approach it will examine secondary literature on the education of Service children and the broader context within which they live and grow up alongside analysis of data produced by the Department for Education and others on the educational performance of Service children. The findings of work undertaken specifically for the report will then be outlined i.e., analysis of the distribution of children eligible for the Service Pupil Premium, analysis of over 100 Access and Participation plans produced by higher education providers; findings from a sample of 20 members of the National Education Opportunities Network and feedback from consultation with different higher education providers and Uni Connect partnerships.

3. ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RISK REGISTER (EORR)

The approach of government to how to extend access to higher education has evolved over the last two decades since the Labour government introduced a target of extending participation in higher education to 50% in 2001. Steadily over time the emphasis has shifted from a collective approach based on increasing participation at local and regional level for those from under-represented groups to a more provider focused approach. Over the last decade this has meant the importance of what individual higher education providers do has grown encapsulated in their Access and Participation Plans (APP). These plans outline out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. They are monitored by the Office for Students. Alongside, APPs the Office for Students also funds the Uni Connect initiative. Started in 2017, Uni Connect brings together 29 regional partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of going to university or college.

3.1 THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES RISK REGISTER (EORR)

In 2022 a new approach to the formation of APPs was proposed which in principle takes the provider focused approach a step further.⁵ In the light of the coronavirus pandemic and recent reforms of their approach to the regulation of quality and standards the Office for Students argued that a regulatory structure that allowed higher education providers to identify the challenges to access and participation in their own specific context was needed.

However, while emphasising that the onus is now on the individual provider to identify where they should focus their widening access efforts, the OfS also produced their own perspective on what the 'risks' to access and participation in higher education are and how they impact on different groups in the form of the Equal Opportunities Risk Register or EORR published in 2023.⁶ The EORR includes 12 different risks and identifies certain groups each risk applies to with the caveat that these may not be the only groups. The full list of risks and the groups they apply to is described in section 7 where the relationship between Service children and the EORR is examined. The EORR underpins new guidance issued to higher education providers in 2023 regarding the production of their Access and Participation Plans. Providers will have to submit new plans from 2023/2024 which focus more on the specific, individual risks where access and participation to higher education in their own institutions are concerned.

In the new EORR several groups with different characteristics are specified as being subject to one or more of the 12 risks identified. However, Service children or children from military families are not one of these groups. This does not preclude access and participation work with Service children. The EORR is a guide, and the emphasis is on providers establishing their own risks and acting accordingly. But as argued in section 7 below, the EORR is likely to have a significant impact on the access and participation work that higher education providers undertake with Service children.

⁵ Office for Students (2022) Consultation on a new approach to regulating equality of opportunity in English higher education, Bristol: Office for Students

⁶ For more information go to: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/equality-of-opportunity-risk-register/>

4. ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND SERVICE CHILDREN – THE CHALLENGES

Service Personnel as well as placing themselves at varying degrees of individual risk also accept that military life will be different from that of the rest of the population. These differences also impact on the lives of their families and children. The latest data from 2022 shows there are around 160,000 Armed Forces personnel in the UK.⁷ Most personnel are within the Army (56%), with the remainder being equally split between the Royal Navy/Royal Marines (RN/RM) and the Royal Air Force (RAF).⁸ Over 90% are stationed in the UK at bases across the whole of the country.⁹ In terms of family life specifically, 78% of Service families have children while 54% have at least one child of school age.¹⁰

Military families navigate the same challenges as civilian families but also ones that are special to military life. It is sometimes said for example that 'when one family member serves, every family member serves'. The Living in Our Shoes report, commissioned by the Ministry of Defence and published in 2020, was the product of an independent review to consider the diverse needs of Service families.¹¹ It pointed to the unique value of the experiences and opportunities that military life offers but also a range of challenges that military families experience in the early 21st century. These challenges provide the context within which Service children experience their education and also shape their potential progression to higher education. As the SCiP Alliance state in their theory of change: 'Service children's lives are characterised by the diversity of individual experiences through the complex interplay of separation, mobility and transition out of the military.'¹²

To support military personnel and their families the Armed Forces Covenant was introduced in 2000. It focuses on ensuring members of the Armed Forces community have the same access to government and commercial services and products as any other citizen. This support is provided in a number of areas including:

- education and family well-being
- having a home
- starting a new career
- access to healthcare
- financial assistance

An annual report to Parliament outlines the work that has been done in relation to the Covenant across several areas including education along with data on outcomes for military personnel and their families.

The existing research looking at the relationship between Service children and education points to 4 issues which are particularly relevant where higher education progression is concerned.

⁷ House of Commons Library (2022) UK defence personnel statistics <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7930/CBP-7930.pdf>

⁸ House of Commons Library (2022) UK defence personnel statistics <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7930/CBP-7930.pdf>

⁹ House of Commons Library (2022) UK defence personnel statistics <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7930/CBP-7930.pdf>

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence (2022) Tri-Service families continuous attitude survey: index <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tri-service-families-continuous-attitude-survey-index>

¹¹ Walker, J Selous, A and Misca, G (2020) Living in Our Shoes, London: Ministry of Defence

¹² For more information go to: <https://www.scipalliance.org/theory-of-change>

4.1 MOBILITY BETWEEN SCHOOLS/ COLLEGES

Service children as a group will experience a higher degree of mobility than those without a serving parent. It is one of the features of Service life for some children. Evidence suggests that in 2021 over 20% of children had moved in the past year with over 40% moving at least twice in the last five years (Lawrence, 2021).¹³ Research undertaken by the National Audit Office in 2013 illustrates how commonplace moving schools is to Service children. Of the 1,000 parents consulted, 96% had moved at least once since their children started school, while 28% had moved seven times or more.¹⁴ Of the over 600 Army parents in the sample a third of them had moved schools with their children over seven times.

Evidence gathered for the Living in Our Shoes report found that children moving schools as many as 7 or 8 schools times was normal. As one parent said:

With it being our tenth move it's highly disruptive to the children's schooling'.

Service children's mobility is distinct from those who move around with parents in other professions due to the lack of agency in terms of timing, location or notice given, all of which impacts significantly on educational transitions. It is worth placing the extent of such mobility in the context of overall pupil mobility in the UK. Research by Jorgensen and Perry looking at all pupils in England over an 11-year period found that around 1-2% of pupils move every term.¹⁵ Thus 3-6% move annually meaning that Service children are over 3 times more likely to move schools than the general population. Research by Prior and Leckie (2022)¹⁶ finds a negative association between mobility and achievement regardless of the reason for moving. Furthermore, children who move schools more frequently are less likely to reach the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2.¹⁷

The impact of moving schools or educational providers on Service children has been well documented. An overview of 70 research papers from 5 countries pointed to a high degree of mobility disrupting Service children's education through discontinuity in their learning and lower engagement with school.¹⁸ In addition, the Living in Our Shoes review collected evidence to indicate that mobility is associated with poor well-being, potential for bullying and disruptions in pastoral support. The National Audit Office study adds further weight to the view that mobility is a major challenge and risk for young people where achieving their education potential is concerned. Over 40% of parents said that that moving home had a negative effect on their children's school performance.

There is also evidence collected by the Department for Education that both paints a powerful picture of the impact of mobility on the educational achievement of Service children but also shows the extent of mobility. Table 1 below is taken from the annual Armed Forces Covenant report in 2022. It shows the impact of 1 or more school moves on the educational attainment of pupils at GCSE for both Service and non-Service children.

¹³ Lawrence, K. (2021). Young People from Armed Forces Families: Post-16 Education and Training Towards a National Strategy for Service Children's Post-16 Success. <https://www.scipalliance.org/assets/files/SCIP-Alliance-Post-16-report-November-2021-FINAL-screen.pdf>

¹⁴ National Audit Office (2013) The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/10145-001-The-Education-of-Service-Children.pdf>

¹⁵ Jorgensen, C and Perry, T (2021) Understanding school mobility and mobile pupils in England, British Educational Research Journal, Vol. 47, No. 5, October 2021, pp. 1139–1157.

¹⁶ Prior, L & Leckie, G (2021) Student mobility: Extent, impacts and predictors of a range of movement types for secondary school students in England, British Educational Research Journal, v48 n5 p1027-1048.

¹⁷ Ministry of Defence (2020) The Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2020 London: Ministry of Defence https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943501/6.6856_MOD_Covenant-Annual-Report-2020-Full-Pages_A4_v16.1_web_3_.pdf

¹⁸ Hall, M, McCullough, J & Lawrence, K (2022) Service children in education: a review of the literature from five countries, Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Volume 24, Number 1, May 2022

TABLE 1: Percentage of pupils with English and maths grades 5-9, and by number of school moves from years 7 to 11, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England¹⁹

		% of pupils reported in spring census				% of pupils achieving English and maths grades 5-9			
Number of moves from year 7 to year 11		0	1	2	3+ ³	0	1	2	3+ ³
2017/18 (revised)	Service children	71.2	22.5	5.2	1.1	49.0	35.3	25.7	16.7
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	82.5	14.6	2.4	0.6	48.9	36.3	23.2	14.0
2018/19	Service children	69.5	24.9	4.3	1.3	47.0	37.8	30.5	13.9
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	82.4	14.7	2.3	0.6	49.3	36.1	23.9	13.8
2019/20	Service children	90.9	7.9	1.0	0.2	51.1	32.2	24.4	50.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	94.9	4.7	0.4	0.0	53.2	32.0	16.9	13.2
2020/21	Service children	93.0	6.4	0.6	0.0	52.2	28.3	26.9	0.0
	Non-Service, non-FSM children	96.4	3.4	0.2	0.0	55.9	33.6	22.7	11.1

As the data illustrates, any move can lead to a fall in at least 14-15% in the percentage of pupils achieving English and Maths grade 5-9. It must also be stated at this stage that the pupil attainment data for 2019/20 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams and teacher assessed grades in 2021. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 data or that from 2020-21 should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance. Up to 3 moves has a huge impact on pupil attainment. This data shows the additional risk to school performance of mobility.

In terms of the scale of mobility for Service children, the pandemic saw a very large fall in mobility over the years in 2019-20 and 2021-22. We would expect mobility to increase to the levels of 2017-18 and 2018-19 now restrictions on movement due to the pandemic have ceased. Indeed, data from 2023 shows that 22% of Service families have changed their home location in the 2022-23 period.²⁰

¹⁹ Ministry of Defence (2022) The Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2022 London: Ministry of Defence https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125589/Armed_Forces_Covenant_annual_report_2022.pdf
The number of school moves between years 7 and 11 shown in the table are for pupils finishing year 11 in the academic year stated. The percentages shown for moves of 3+ are volatile, based on very small numbers of pupils and conclusions should be treated with caution.
The 2017-18 figures are based on those in the National Pupil Database, which may differ slightly from finalised published figures.
The pupil attainment data for 2019/20 is based on Centre Assessment Grades rather than exams. Summer 2020 and 2021 exams were cancelled due to the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, the 2019/20 data should not be directly compared to attainment data from previous years for the purposes of measuring changes in student performance.
The pupil attainment data for 2021 is based on teacher assessment grades submitted by their school rather than exams. This is a different process to 2020 where centre assessment grades were awarded. Due to the changed awarding process for GCSE grades it is recommended that year on year comparisons are not made to 2020 or other years.

²⁰ Ministry of Defence (2022) UK Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2022 - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1091338/Tri-Service_Families_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2022_Main_Report.pdf

4.2 SEPARATION AND THE IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND FAMILY LIFE

For many young people separation from their serving parent is an inevitable part of Service family life. Work undertaken by the Rand Corporation in 2009 which examined adolescents' views of the best and worst aspects of having a father in the Armed Forces found that the worst aspect was lack of contact with the absent parent, with 39% of young people referring to being worried about their father's safety on deployment.²¹ Further work by McCulloch et al (2018) suggests that in the views of Service children deployment was a far greater challenge than mobility.²² Granada & Mulcahy (2022) undertook qualitative research with young people aged 16-19 from Service backgrounds to better understand their educational experiences. Echoing the work of the Rand Corporation above they found that young people identified deployment as the main barrier to their educational performance. As one of the participants in the research stated:

●● It does take a hold of you, especially when they're gone... you've got everything bearing down on you, school, work, general household things. And you do feel about to explode from it all'.



In her submission to the Living in Our Shoes report, a mother gave a parent's perspective on the impact of deployment:

●● My children have suffered monumentally from their father's deployment and the lack of certainty about when he was coming home'.

The consequences of deployment can be significant stress affecting performance in education and wellbeing.

Deployment can also increase the responsibilities at home that some young people have to deal with. It has been associated with negative impacts on the mental health and well being of Service children. It has also been associated with reduced interest in and engagement with education, less parental involvement in their children's education, increased incidence of emotional and behavioural problems and a higher incidence of mental health issues in children and parents. These challenges are exacerbated the longer the deployment and when it is in combat situations.²³ Deployment can hamper optimum decision making at points of transition and also lead to a greater likelihood of children becoming a carer. Research by the Children's Society points to the implications for Service children of caring responsibilities.²⁴ There is a range of evidence showing that children who have caring responsibilities are more likely to require support for mental health problems, including anxiety and depression and have poorer academic outcomes.²⁵

²¹ Rand Corporation (2009) Military children face more emotional challenges as parental deployments grow longer, Science Daily

²² McCulloch, J, Hall, M & Ellis, S (2018) The Education of Children from Military Families: Identity and Agency Education Futures, Vol (2) December 2018

²³ Hall, M, McCulloch, J & Lawrence, K (2022) Service children in education: a review of the literature from five countries, Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Volume 24, Number 1, May 2022
McCulloch, J, Hall, M (2016) Further and Higher Progression for Service Children: Research Paper – University of Winchester
North Yorkshire County Council (2018) Growing up in North Yorkshire
https://cyps.northyorks.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Childrens%20voice/GUNY/NYork2018summary_SCREEN.pdf

²⁴ The Children's Society (2017) Young carers in armed forces families
<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf>

²⁵ The Children's Society (2017) Young carers in armed forces families
<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-10/young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf>

4.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION CHALLENGES

Service children, like any other category of young people, are heterogeneous. Individual Service children as well as having gender, ethnic and other identities are also impacted by the Service in which their parents are in, their rank and relationship to deployment. They are also differentiated by socio-economic background which is crucial when engagement with higher education is concerned. Data on the socio-economic background of those in the services is not collected systematically. Recent research by Clark et al (2020)²⁶ looked at the relationship between socio-economic background and promotion in the Senior Ranks in the Royal Navy Logistics Branch in the UK. It is the first quantitative analysis of Royal Navy officers' socio-economic backgrounds that has used primary data since 1975. It shows the disproportionate overrepresentation amongst officers of those from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds. Previous work has also shown a relationship between parents' rank and their children's intent to attend university or join the military exists. Children of those in higher ranks indicated the greatest intent to go to university and to join the military while those of NCOs (non-Commissioned officers) indicated the lowest intent to go to university and no particular intent to join the military.²⁷

In terms of the impact of socio-economic background on the education of Service children the work by Granada & Mulcahy (2022)²⁸ highlighted the challenges faced by some young people. They stated that 'a characteristic of Service life appeared to be trapping some families in poverty, as the non-serving parent was unable to work and manage the household single-handedly during the serving parent's deployment'.

²⁶ Clark, S. M., Hack-Polay, D., & Bal, P. M. (2022) Social Mobility and Promotion of Officers to Senior Ranks in the Royal Navy: Meritocracy or Class Ceiling? Armed Forces & Society, 48(1), 92–114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X20905118>

²⁷ McCulloch, J, Hall, M (2016) Further and Higher Progression for Service Children: Research Paper – University of Winchester

²⁸ Granada, A & Mulcahy, E (2022) Diversity meets complexity: Supporting Armed Forces Young People to thrive in post-16 education, Service Children's Progression Alliance/Centre for Education and Youth

²⁹ Weale, S (2023) Poor housing a growing barrier to school attendance in England, charity reveals, Guardian 14th May 2023,

As one young person stated:

●● We're a family of eight, and five of us are on the spectrum, but because my father makes more than the amount required, we're not entitled to Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). But my bus pass, gosh, 150 quid a term to get down to town to be able to attend my school. I can't pay that. I have got 0% attendance because I can't get there... there are other kids [younger siblings] that need to go to school more than I do'.

Accommodation is one of the major concerns of serving personnel and the Living in Our Shoes report found considerable problems with the military housing stock in which 57% of families live at least some of the time. At the Defence Select Committee hearing in February 2019, the state of the SFA stock was described as 'shameful' and while there has been investment in recent years there were many complaints received in the Living in Our Shoes enquiry. As one parent stated:

●● I have had a hole in my roof for four months which means when it rains I have to have a bucket in my hallway to collect the rainwater. It results in a damp and mouldy house and with an 8-month-old, a 4 and a 6 year-old this is unacceptable'.

A number of reports point to the relationship between poor housing and educational achievement.²⁹ There is no definitive data that establishes the relationship between the socio-economic background of Service personnel and residence in military accommodation but there is clear evidence that many children are experiencing material risk to their educational progression as a result of their housing circumstances.

4.4 THE EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICE CHILDREN RECEIVE

The unique nature of Service children's progression to adulthood poses challenges for the school system in providing adequate support for them. This challenge sits in the context of a school system which is already under pressure due to teacher shortages and financial restrictions. Nevertheless, the gaps in support for Service children from the school system need to be highlighted to demonstrate the risks to higher education progression they face.

Available research argues that the support Service children receive from schools/colleges is inconsistent. In 2011 the Service Pupil Premium (SPP) was introduced in England funded and via the Department for Education (DfE). The premium of £335 per Service child from Reception to year 11 is paid directly to schools to support Service children.

As the guidance on the use of the Service Pupil Premium provided by the government states:

*'Eligible schools receive the SPP so that they can offer mainly pastoral support during challenging times and to help mitigate the negative impact on Service children of family mobility or parental deployment.'*³⁰

The lack of consistency and understanding about how the SPP can support Service children has been well documented.³¹ The Children's Commissioner's report 'Kin and Country' in 2018 indicated that in the schools with a distinct group of Service children the support provided was well structured but where this was not the case support was very variable.³² The problem of schools with small numbers of Service children being unprepared in how to support them was also a conclusion reached by the Living in Our Shoes report via their consultation with the parents of Service children and the research undertaken by the National Audit Office in 2013.³³ As one parent in the National Audit Office research stated:

³⁰ For more information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium/service-pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know>

³¹ McCullough J and Hall M (2016) Further and Higher Progression for Service Children, University of Winchester

³² Children's Commissioner (2018) Kin and Country: Growing up as an Armed Forces child - <https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2018/06/KIN-AND-COUNTRY-Growing-up-as-an-Armed-Forces-child.pdf>

³³ National Audit Office (2013) The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation

●● *There is a lack of knowledge among staff of the mood changes experienced by Service children when their parents deploy. A child will be upset or irritable and some teachers see this as the child misbehaving rather than the turmoil that they are experiencing."*

Service parent, Royal Navy

These challenges when it comes to the ability of schools to support Service children are exacerbated by the frequency of mobility as documented above and especially when those moves are across the devolved nations.

4.5 SERVICE CHILDREN AND ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The challenges of supporting Service children can be magnified when their Service children status intersects with other characteristics. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has noted that Service children have a higher rate of caring responsibilities than children in the general population.³⁴ The Children's Society 2017 report 'Young Carers in Armed Forces Families', undertakes detailed research with young carers who are also Service children and their families to understand better the nature of the issues here.³⁵ As one young carer states:

●● *When I was at school it was hard for me because I used to get bullied anyway, but no one knew what my home life was like. Even teachers weren't aware that I was a member of an armed forces family and that I was helping care and look after my younger brother who has learning disabilities. If teachers were aware then this could have changed my life and maybe I would have got more support and help at school that I really needed.'*

For Service children with Special educational or additional needs and disabilities (SEND) there are also particular issues. As the Living in my Shoes report states:

*'challenges are exacerbated by military life, however, and we received many responses about the problems Service families have faced. It can often be difficult to obtain recognition that children have additional needs, and ensuring they receive the most suitable education for them can be a source of considerable stress when families move from one area to another'.*³⁶

More data and evidence are needed to understand the impact of the characteristics described above on higher education progression for Service children.

4.6 RISKS AND EDUCATION FOR SERVICE CHILDREN

The challenges described above are significant. In isolation they would inevitably shape to a degree the educational trajectory of any young person. But they exist together as a set of risks, overlapping and intersecting in individualised ways for every Service child. As the Living in Our Shoes report states:

●● *Frequent moves and a lack of educational stability undoubtedly constitute risk factors for children's learning'*

However, Service children should not be seen through a 'deficit model' where their education is concerned i.e., a default assumption that all Service children are disadvantaged. Much of the research documented in the section above refers to the the value of Service life and the opportunities it brings to young people. Nor though should these challenges be seen as an inevitable by-product of Service life and thus discounted. There are risks to educational success and progression to higher education Service children face.



³⁴ Department of Health (2015) Supporting the health and well-being of military families.

³⁵ The Children's Society (2017) Young Carers in Armed Forces Families: Evidencing the need, The Children's Society

³⁶ Walker, J Selous, A and Misca, G (2020) Living in Our Shoes, London: Ministry of Defence

5. HOW MANY SERVICE CHILDREN ARE THERE AND WHERE CAN THEY BE FOUND?

5.1 THE DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE CHILDREN

In order to establish in more detail, the geographical distribution of Service children in England we have examined 2022-23 data from the Department for Education which shows how many children registered as entitled to the Service Pupil Premium are educated at primary and secondary level in each local authority in England. The definition of Service children used for the purposes of the collection of this data is narrower than that used by the SCiP Alliance, but this dataset is the most reliable available. The SCiP Alliance has also taken data from pupils recorded in October 2021 and January 2022 school censuses to construct an online targeting tool which shows the numbers of Service children in primary and secondary settings, by local authority.³⁷

There are 4 headline findings from this analysis:

FINDING 1: SERVICE CHILDREN ARE A SIGNIFICANT MINORITY IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The total number of reported pupils at primary and secondary level were 79,814. It compares in number to many of the ethnic groups about whom data on educational achievement and progression is collected. Of the 19 ethnic groups on whom data is collected by the Department for Education there are more Service children than there are children in 6 of these groups.

FINDING 2: SERVICE CHILDREN ARE EDUCATED ACROSS ENGLAND

Of all the schools at primary and secondary level 52% had at least one pupil in receipt of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP). At secondary level, 81% of schools had at least one pupil in receipt of SPP. In all (bar one) local authorities there are at least 2 children receiving SPP.

FINDING 3: SERVICE CHILDREN ARE CLUSTERED IN CERTAIN AREAS

Service children are overrepresented in certain regions, with approximately 50% of the cohort coming from 8% of local authorities. The local authorities with the most pupils were Hampshire, Wiltshire, Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, and Oxfordshire.

FINDING 4: SERVICE CHILDREN ARE SPREAD THINLY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Of all the schools who have pupils in receipt of the Service Pupil Premium (SPP), 40% of the secondary schools had only 1 pupil and 80% of primary schools only 1 pupil.

5.2 ATTAINMENT AND SERVICE CHILDREN

Data on the attainment in schools of Service children is published in the annual Armed Forces Covenant report.³⁸ In the latest report published in 2022, the data shows only a small difference in attainment between Service children and those from non-Service backgrounds at GCSE as Table 2 below shows.

TABLE 2: Average Attainment 8 scores at GCSE, for Service children and non-Service, non-Free School Meal children, in England

YEAR	SERVICE CHILDREN	NON-SERVICE, NON-FSM CHILDREN
2017	47.8	48
2018	48	48.3
2019	48	48.6
2020	52	52.4
2021	52.5	53.6

There is a recognition though that this data should be approached with a degree of caution. It should also be pointed out that this data is for the whole cohort. If it were possible to differentiate within the cohort by indicative measures of socio-economic background or other indicators then a more nuanced picture of the attainment of Service children could be developed.



³⁷ For more information: <https://www.scipalliance.org/map>

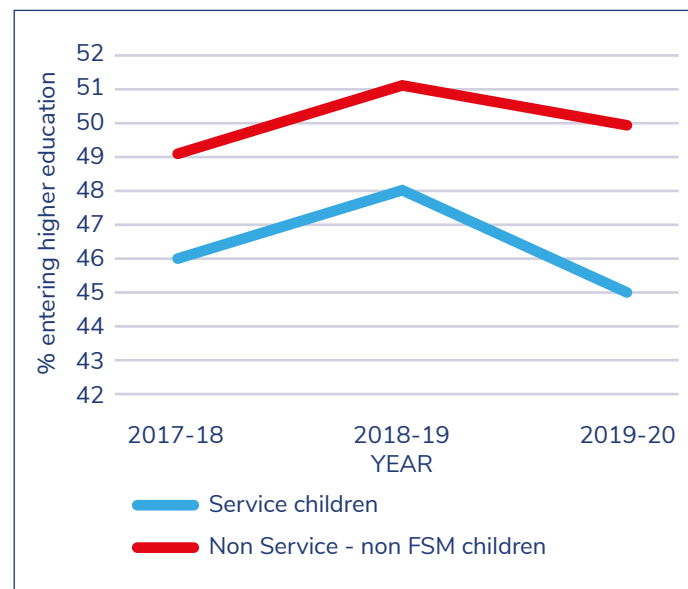
³⁸ Ministry of Defence (2022) The Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans Annual Report 2022 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1125589/Armed_Forces_Covenant_annual_report_2022.pdf

5.3 HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRESSION AND SERVICE CHILDREN

Where higher education progression is concerned it has been argued in several reports that there is a need for more data here.³⁹ In the 2016 report by McCullough and Hall it was estimated that Service children were progressing to higher education at a significantly lower rate than non-Service children. The participation rate for Service children was estimated to be 24% for those 18-30 as opposed to 43% for those from non-Service backgrounds, but the authors acknowledge the lack of reliable data as a significant limitation.

The Department for Education has been collecting data on the progression to higher education destinations of Service children for several years as part of work monitoring the progression of learners from Key Stage 5. The data shows a small but growing gap in higher education progression between Service children and non-service, non-FSM children as shown in Diagram 1 below. Since 2017-18 the gap in higher education progression between Service children and non-Service children has increased to 5%: a material gap in higher education progression.

DIAGRAM 1: Higher education progression of Service and non-Service non-FSM children



In 2022 UCAS have included for the first time a question in which applicants for higher education via their system are given the opportunity, if they wish, to indicate whether their parents or carers have a military background⁴⁰. This is a significant move forward which should improve understanding of the numbers of applicants and acceptances in higher education for Service children and their distribution across providers and by geography.

Finally, as with attainment there may be differences in higher education progression for particular groups of Service children, for example those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or those experiencing high levels of mobility for example. However, the data is not available at this point in time to explore the progression to higher education of such groups.

³⁹ McCullough, J, Hall, M (2016) *Further and Higher Progression for Service Children: Research Paper* – University of Winchester
Granada, A & Mulcahy, E (2022) *Diversity meets complexity: Supporting Armed Forces Young People to thrive in Post-16 education*, Service Children's Progression Alliance/Centre for Education and Youth
Hall, M, McCullough, J & Lawrence, K (2022) *Service children in education: a review of the literature from five countries*, Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Volume 24, Number 1, May 2022

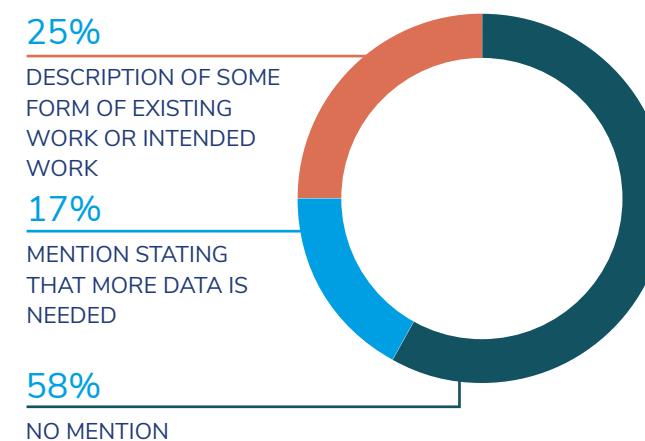
⁴⁰ For more information: <https://www.ucas.com/providers/good-practice/emerging-cohorts/service-children>

6. HOW HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS ARE SUPPORTING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN HE FOR SERVICE CHILDREN

6.1 SERVICE CHILDREN AND ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLANS (APPs)

As outlined above higher education providers in England will be submitting revised APPs over the course of 2023 to 2024. For this report the APPs that are in force at present covering the period 2020-21 to 2024-25 were examined to understand the extent to which military children were mentioned and in what way. Diagram 2 summarises the findings of an analysis of the plans of 116 higher education providers. These are the largest providers of higher education in England who submit data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

DIAGRAM 2: Access and Participation Plans 2020-21 to 2024-25 and children from military families



The higher education providers who include a description of some form of existing work or intended work are listed in Appendix 1. Similar analysis was done looking at Access and Participation Plans in 2020. In this analysis 163 APPs were examined and 58 described some form of existing work or intended work with Service children which equates to 35% of the sample. This compares to 25% of providers highlighting existing/intended work in the analysis above. Hence, there has been a decline of 10% in the number of providers who are focusing on Service children in their APPs over the last 3 years.

The analysis of APPs shows that the majority of mainstream higher education providers in England are not engaged in work with Service children. Indeed, they are not mentioned at all in over half of APPs. As the analysis above in section 5 shows though they are found in significant numbers in all parts of the country. There is clearly much to do therefore to ensure that Service children are embedded in the outreach work of higher education providers in England. However, the analysis does show that there is a body of work developing and engagement at different levels from higher education providers with contrasting characteristics drawn from across the country. The growth of this work highlights the increasing importance that some providers are giving to access work with Service children. In addition, it should be stated that the APP is a strategic document and does not describe every piece of access and participation work that a provider delivers. Thus, it cannot capture the full extent of the engagement of a provider in this area. The APP is crucial though in shaping what access and participation work a provider delivers. Hence, it is valuable to examine what a provider, if so minded, could include in their APP, to summarise their commitment to supporting Service children. Box 1 describes what the University of Bolton include in their 2020-21 APP regarding Service children.

BOX 1: UNIVERSITY OF BOLTON⁴¹



The University of Bolton has over 11,000 students and admits significantly more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds than the national average. In terms of Service children in Bolton there are only 120 Service children across 50 schools. In its Access and Participation Plan the university includes the information below with regard to Service children and ex Service Personnel.

A commitment to take steps to ensure we have accurate data on this group during 2021-22 and then to increase participation by 30% over the 5-year period.

Financial support to help attract ex-Service personnel who have completed a minimum of three years in the armed services. This bursary is worth £500 per year for the normal duration of the course to support participation.

During the first Semester of 2020-21 the Greater Manchester Hub of the SCiP (Service Children's Progression) Alliance will be established, with the University of Bolton as host.

6.2 SERVICE CHILDREN AND UNI CONNECT

As outlined above, alongside APPs, the other mechanism by which the Office for Students looks to achieve its aims related to access and participation is via the Uni Connect initiative. Uni Connect is the latest in a line of regionally based, government funded widening access initiatives stretching back to the year 2000. These include the £700m Aimhigher programme of the 2000s. Uni Connect is more modestly funded with an annual budget of £30m at present and threats to its future funding exist despite independent evaluation showing its impact.⁴²

Alongside the analysis described in section 5 of the distribution of Service children across schools and local authorities we also undertook an analysis of distribution by Uni Connect area. The distribution of Service children by Uni Connect partnership is shown in Table 3 next.

⁴¹ For more information: https://www.bolton.ac.uk/assets/Hosted/UniversityofBolton_APP_2021_22_V1_100006841.pdf
⁴² CfE Research (2023) Fifth independent review of impact evaluation evidence submitted by Uni Connect partnerships - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/fifth-independent-review-of-impact-evaluation-evidence-submitted-by-uni-connect-partnerships/>

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE CHILDREN BY UNI CONNECT PARTNERSHIP

UNI CONNECT PARTNERSHIPS	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TOTAL
Aimhigher West Midlands	1118	829	1947
Aspire Higher	777	682	1459
Aspire to HE	452	428	880
Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Collaborative Outreach Programme	1010	830	1840
Future Quest	261	156	417
Future U	862	710	1572
Go Higher West Yorkshire	514	542	1056
Greater Manchester Higher	581	583	1164
GROWS (GAP)	919	814	1733
Hello Future	216	232	448
HEPP SY	581	564	1145
Higher Horizons+	1889	1426	3315
Humber Outreach Programme (HOP)	645	690	1335
Inspiring Choices	2528	1489	4017
Kent and Medway Collaborative Outreach Programme	813	979	1792
LiNC Higher	2509	2061	4571
London Uni Connect	883	615	1498
Make Happen	1061	667	1728
Network for East Anglian Collaborative Outreach (NEACO)	3010	1905	4915
Next Steps South West	5233	3976	9209
North East Uni Connect Programme	2048	1837	3885
Pathways	669	520	1189
Shaping Futures	590	583	1173
Southern Universities Network	5888	3889	9777
Study Higher	3613	2140	5753
Sussex Learning Network	523	453	976
The Higher Education Outreach Network (HEON)	1405	1077	2482
Think Higher	331	258	589
Wessex Inspiration Network	4814	3130	7944
Grand Total	45743	34065	79809

The analysis shows that the number of Service pupils ranges from:

- 417 to 9777 in total including those in primary and secondary school.
- 156 to 3889 when looking at just those in secondary school.

It also shows that of the 29 Uni Connect partnerships only 5 have fewer than 500 Service pupils at secondary level. As would be expected on the basis of the analysis above by region the pupils are concentrated in certain Uni Connect areas in the south of England and in Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire.

The pupils are distributed across different year groups thus making the numbers in each year smaller than the total number of pupils, but nevertheless there are few Uni Connect partnerships (if any) where it could be argued that groups of Service children with whom outreach activities could in principle be delivered do not exist. Given the spread of Service children across schools and local authorities in order to undertake activities which usually require groups of at least 10 or more then a collaborative approach across providers is more often than not required (work with individual Service children is a possibility but likely to be prohibitively expensive). As illustrated above the driver for this cross school collaborative work can be

a higher education provider but given that Uni Connect partnerships work across a number of schools/colleges they also have a natural role co-ordinating such collaboration. There is evidence that they are playing this role in some parts of the country working pro-actively on widening access programmes for Service children.

The SCiP Alliance is supporting collaborative work via its Hub Network as well as established and routinely evaluated approaches like the 'Creative Forces Day' programme.

A Creative Forces Day gives higher education providers an opportunity to bring Service children from a variety of schools together to experience a day on a university campus and explore their identity as Service children. It is also an opportunity to build the capacity of schools to understand and support their Service children. Creative Forces Days have been delivered at both primary and secondary level.⁴³ There are also examples of good practice in collaborative work with Service children as shown in Box 2 below.

BOX 2: SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES NETWORK



The Southern Universities Network (SUN) is a collaborative partnership comprising HE providers in Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight. The SUN provides outreach activities for schools and colleges as part of Uni Connect. In collaboration with the SCiP Alliance they are delivering a series of sessions aimed at schools to support them in working with Service children. This training will be online and accredited and be delivered in 2023-24. It will help participants:

- Understand the term Service child and who Service children are;
- Gain an awareness of the barriers and disruption Service children can face in education;
- Consider the value and diversity that Service children can bring to a school;
- Identify how to apply the SCiP Alliance's Thriving Lives Toolkit to a school setting;
- Develop an awareness of how to support Service children in school.

6.3 WIDENING ACCESS WORK AND SERVICE CHILDREN – KEY CHALLENGES

The analysis of APPs shows that widening access work is being undertaken across the higher education sector with this group of learners. As part of this study a focus group was convened bringing together 13 representatives of higher education providers and Uni Connect partnerships to discuss the nature of the widening access work being delivered with Service children, challenges in how it was delivered and views of the future. Alongside this group a consultation exercise with members of the National Education Opportunities Network was undertaken.

The 3 key findings of these two exercises are described below:

FINDING 1: WIDENING ACCESS WORK CONTRIBUTES TO SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT WITH SERVICE CHILDREN

As outlined in section 4 above, the level of support that schools offer for Service children is very variable. In this regard, widening access work has had a vital role to play both via higher education providers and Uni Connect partnerships in stimulating greater engagement of schools with Service children.

⁴³ For more information: <https://www.scipalliance.org/resources/creative-forces-an-evaluated-model-of-he-outreach>

●● We managed to engage the senior leadership team at a school, and they rewrote their plan for Service children because they thought it was inadequate.'

●● Continuous Professional Development (CPD) with teachers is really important. We've had teachers that have brought Service children along to a campus visit and have been listening to the Service children talk about their personal experiences, and this has given teachers insights they never had before into children's lives'.

FINDING 2: MAKING WORK WITH SERVICE CHILDREN AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY CAN BE DIFFICULT

The focus group discussion involved those engaged in and committed to widening access work with Service children based at higher education providers and organisations that allowed space for this work to develop. However, this did not imply that securing institutional support was straightforward. Repeatedly, the problem of work with Service children being driven forward by passionate individuals rather than institutions was mentioned.

●● Our senior management team member in charge of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) has questioned me many times regarding why the SCiP Alliance is mentioned on our APP. We are also asked 'why do we want to look at Service children?' It's not seen as a high priority, and I am constantly battling against that, and it is the most frustrating thing.'

●● The Ministry of Defence wrote to all Vice Chancellors encouraging them to work with Service children and my university responded positively saying we will include Service children in the APP. However, I was sitting in the room when they were signing off the final APP and I read through it, and they were not mentioned. I then had to approach other senior staff to try and get them included.'

●● The category of Service children isn't considered as high a priority as some of the other categories at an institutional level. At an institutional level, in the last 'Post pandemic years' resourcing capacity has changed, and funding is seen in a different way of what used to be. Working with Service children is seen as a nice thing for us to do by the institution but what is the serious business case?'

Some examples of overcoming these barriers were offered, including trying to link work with Service children to other strategic widening access priorities:

●● I've created a brand-new attainment related project and I've made sure that one of the protected characteristics related to participants its Service children. I'm going to make sure that the 10 schools that I propose to work really closely with will be able to provide me at least one Service child within their school that can be part of this project.'



FINDING 3: ABSENCE OF SERVICE CHILDREN IN THE EORR PRESENTS A NEW CHALLENGE

The EORR is only at the beginning of its lifespan. Approximately 40 higher education providers are submitting revised APPs as part of wave 1 in 2023 with the remainder having to submit in 2024. However, there was one provider in the pilot phase represented in the discussion and they, alongside the rest of the group had cause for concern regarding the absence of Service children from the EORR. They were of the view that if Service children are not specified in the EORR then this would mean providers were far less likely to engage with them. In the words of one, this will 'make a difficult job even harder'. It will exacerbate the problems described above in securing institutional support for work with this group.

●● *I think that is a risk because I think you will have institutions saying: 'We're doing really well. We've got a really diverse student population coming in from those of different backgrounds. So, we're not going to concentrate on this group'.*

●● *It's horrible, but institutions will make a choice between a project for mature learners or Service children or young carers. If they are not a priority for the OfS they will miss out.'*

●● *It does feel like an odd omission. I don't understand why the omission has been made. When universities are making big decisions regarding their APP it's going to be very easy to just discount work with this group now'.*

●● *Universities that don't have those passionate people to drive the change will just say they're not part of the priority groups any anymore because they're not explicit within the EORR'.*

7. SUPPORTING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SERVICE CHILDREN- A FORWARD LOOKING APPROACH

The evidence above points to a sizeable group of young people who are less likely to enter higher education than the norm, who experience a unique set of educational challenges and a higher education sector that recognizes this to an extent. However, this recognition and the activities that flow from it may now be at risk. Moving this work forward would always be a significant task. As was pointed out by one of the respondents in section 6 above, Service children are, in a sense, 'competing' with other groups of learners for attention and resources and our understanding of how Service children experience and progress in education needs far greater development. Nevertheless, the absence of Service children from the first iteration of the EORR does appear to be an additional challenge that risks setting back the work described in section 5. The EORR will undoubtedly aid the progress of widening access and participation work overall by enabling a more refined understanding of the barriers which hold back those with the potential to enter HE and stimulating more focused, evidence driven work. It is though in its early stages and as yet, little independent work has been done looking at how it has been constructed and nor have the OfS provided this as yet. This section will look in more detail at how existing evidence concerning Service children's life experiences and engagement in education relate to the risks specified in the EORR.

7.1 SERVICE CHILDREN & THE EORR

As stated above, there are 12 'risks' to equality of opportunity specified in the EORR. The earlier risks begin with a focus on access to higher education before moving to concentrate on success when students enter higher education and then progression after higher education study. The focus here is on access to higher education as the evidence on success and progression has not been collected as yet (although we do return to this in the recommendations).

The EORR as presented by the OfS was informed by a research report they commissioned from the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO)⁴⁴ entitled 'Rapid review to support development of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR)'.⁴⁵

This report contained only a small section on Service children. It stated that: 'According to UCAS, research indicates that learners from military families are less likely to go to HE than their peers. The participation rate is estimated to be 24% (compared to a national average of 43%) (UCAS, 2022a). Those with high-ranking parent(s) and carer(s) are more likely to aspire to HE than those with lower ranking parent(s)

and carer(s), who tend to perform below the national average.'

The review had to cover a wide range of potential target groups for widening access work. The specific focus on Service children in this report allows a more detailed exploration of the relevant evidence that points the relationship between the risks specified in the EORR and Service children than the TASO review was able to undertake. This relationship is described in Diagram 3 below. It identifies four of the risks on the EORR and summarises how they relate to Service children drawing on the evidence outlined in sections 4 to 6 of this report.

DIAGRAM 3: HOW SERVICE CHILDREN FIT IN THE EORR

EORR RISK	HOW IT RELATES TO SERVICE CHILDREN
RISK 1: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS Students may not have equal opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to be accepted onto HE courses that match their expectations and ambitions. Factors that influence this can include (but are not limited to) a student's home circumstances, the school that they attend or the area where they live.	Service children have higher rates of family mobility than non-Service children which can lead to a fall in attainment of at least 15% at GCSE. Separation can make developing higher education knowledge/skills difficult, and careers support inconsistent leading to Service children not having equal opportunities to work with parents on future choices. A product of Service children not having the equal opportunity to develop knowledge and skills is a 5% gap in participation in higher education between non-Service children and their peers. The disruption to education and opportunities can be particularly pronounced for mobile Service children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
RISK 2: INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE Students may not have equal opportunity to receive the information and guidance that will enable them to develop ambition and expectations, or to make informed choice about their higher education options.	The school sector has found it difficult to support Service children to the level they would like to, which impacts on the ability of learners to make informed choices about higher education options. Mobility is likely to impact on the consistent receipt of information and guidance. Separation may impact on students' capacity to plan for the future and make informed choices. Outside of small pockets of concentration, Service children are spread very thinly, most commonly being the only Service child in a school meaning tailored information/guidance and support can be a challenge.
RISK 3: PERCEPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION Students may not feel able to apply to higher education, or certain types of providers within higher education, despite being qualified.	The majority (75% in our analysis) of higher education providers do not recognise the needs of Service children in their Access and Participation Plans. This lack of recognition and visibility may mean Service children perceive a limited range of higher education providers as open to them. Mobility may limit or disrupt the continuity of widening access/outreach support provided to Service children hampering their ability to consider the full range of course and providers for which they are qualified.
RISK 5: LIMITED CHOICE OF COURSE TYPE AND DELIVERY MODE Students may not have equal opportunity to access a sufficiently wide variety of higher education course types. Regional differences in the availability of types of higher education courses and the mode of course delivery that are offered may result in some groups of students not being able to attend a course of their choice.	Over half of Service children are resident in less than 10% of local authorities. Students are most likely to study in their home region, so the concentration of Service children in certain areas of the country may limit choices for the group pushing them toward a narrow range of institutions and, therefore, courses. Service children are also more likely to be young carers which may also restrict their course options to those in their home region only.

⁴⁴ For more information please go to: <https://taso.org.uk/>
⁴⁵ TASO (2023) Rapid review to support development of the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) - Report to the Office for Students by TASO

In the absence, yet, of analysis from the OfS outlining how they matched different groups of learners to particular risks it is not possible to say whether the exercise above shows that Service children meet the 'risk threshold' that permits inclusion in the EORR. However, Diagram 3 does show that for 4 of the risks there is evidence to establish that Service children may be subject to that risk.



7.2 UNIVERSITIES, PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS OR COLLEGES?

Aside from the position of Service children in the EORR, there is a broader question of who is responsible for supporting the progression to higher education of Service children. The EORR is not designed to actively prevent organisations working separately or collaboratively to enable their progression. The short answer is that it is a shared responsibility as encompassed by the SCiP Alliance creating a network of Hubs across the country. They have a broader remit than just higher education progression and 'focus on the education of children and young people in Armed Forces families. Hubs get stakeholders in an area together to identify the needs of the Service children in that area and collaborate on activity to address those needs.

The hubs are playing a key role in enabling collaboration to support the education of Service children but where access to higher education is concerned the question of responsibility is still an issue. Supporting progression to higher education per se is an issue for many schools and colleges with the level of support that students receive very variable in the absence of any adequately funded national careers Service – the Education Select Committee being only the latest body to point to the huge problems here with a report released in June 2023.⁴⁶ The extent to which universities are taking responsibility is limited as section 6 shows. While Uni Connect has the potential to play a major role here the framework and funding related to it do not facilitate that at present. Broadening responsibility to a wider set of stakeholders here while at the same time articulating what they are responsible for is going to be required if this work is to move forward.

⁴⁶ UK Parliament (2023) Raise aspiration and counter negative stereotypes by teaching young children about careers <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/196029/raise-aspiration-and-counter-negative-stereotypes-by-teaching-young-children-about-careers/>

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence collected and the analysis undertaken above, ten recommendations to support the progression of Service children to higher education are outlined below.

FOR THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS

1. Update the EORR to include Service children in relation to risks 1, 2, 3 and 5 before the guidance for wave 2 of Access and Participation Plans is issued in early 2024.

There is sufficient evidence presented in this report to merit a process of review of the omission of Service children from the EORR. Certainly, in the absence of detailed knowledge of the methodology by which the EORR was constructed this case is even stronger. The work presented above which looks in detail at how Service children are subject to individual risks in the EORR has not been done publicly for the groups that actually are in the EORR. The purpose of the EORR is to enable increased and better support for learners to whom opportunity is denied them. It is not the intention of the OfS for sure to reduce the support that learners who may wish to enter HE receive but that is what will happen if Service children remain omitted from the EORR.

2. Share the methodology underlying the construction of the EORR after wave 1 of Access and Participation Plans are reviewed in late 2023.

A better understanding of the how the EORR has been constructed would enhance its effectiveness. It would assist providers in applying the information in the EORR to their own institutional context. Before providers are asked to submit new APPs next year the OfS should produce a series of papers which outlines how they see each of the designated groups impacted on by particular risks.

3. Establish a specific role for Uni Connect partnerships to support collaboration in support of Service children from 2024-25 onwards.

For over 20 years regional collaborative outreach partnerships have played a vital role in the improvements in the numbers of learners from under-represented groups progressing to higher education. They have a natural role to play where relatively small groups of learners under-represented in higher education are concerned. By working across areas in a neutral fashion they can provide the practical and strategic underpinning for work with a diffused group such as Service children and should be given a stronger remit to do so. There is a review of Uni Connect being undertaken in 2023. It is strongly recommended that Uni Connect remains a centrally funded initiative and the review is seen as an opportunity to focus its efforts on the work that can have the greatest impact including work with Service children.

4. Strengthen guidance for Access and Participation plans to be submitted in 2024 to give greater emphasis on small numerical groups including Service children.

The challenges in terms of data collection and delivery of access and participation activities with regard to Service children described in this report are not peculiar to this group. Other groups face similar challenges. The danger with giving even greater latitude to providers to determine risk while at the same time focusing entirely on data is that APPs will de facto ignore groups such as Service children. There is an opportunity here for the OfS to strengthen the work that providers do with these groups as we approach another set of APPs being produced across the sector.

5. Undertake work on the intersection between background characteristics of Service children, including socio-economic background, and their progression to higher education in 2024

One of the major issues where progression to higher education was concerned for Service children was understanding the size, distribution and educational performance of sub cohorts of learners within the overall group that is Service children. In particular, the intersection of a Service children identity with socio economic group was seen to be an area where greater understanding would be very valuable. However, specific scoping work on how this data could be collected and what the use of differing proxy measures of socio-economic background may show is required. Such work could also explore the interaction of other characteristics such as gender and ethnicity within the Service children cohort.

FOR THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

6. Work with partners to produce a new annual publication looking at progress in supporting progression to higher education of Service children to be launched in 2024.

Maintaining the awareness of Service children's needs is, and will continue to be, an ongoing task. There needs to be sufficient evidence informed work that can support this task. The Armed Forces Covenant report includes valuable Department of Education data on progression to higher education. However, it must cover the breadth of issues related to service personnel. There is a need for a new, annual review that aims to drive improvement in the progression of Service children to higher education. This review would assess progress in the provision of data on the progression of Service children to HE as recommended in this report incorporating the forthcoming new work from UCAS; engagement with Service children by the HE sector in the new APPs to be produced in forthcoming years and monitor how practice across schools, colleges and higher education is developing. The review can be a crucial tool to ensure that Service children remain on the agenda of policymakers, government bodies and the higher education sector.

7. Follow the lead of other major employers across the public and private sectors and undertake exploratory work on collecting data on the socio-economic background of Armed Forces personnel in 2024.

There is a broader push at present from organisations working in the social mobility field to get more employers to collect as a matter of course data on the socio-economic background of their staff. This is to act as a stimulus for employers to introduce initiatives to address barriers to advancement and also entry by socio-economic background. It has also been suggested that the government could take a lead here by making the collection of such data mandatory in the public services. Collecting such data in the Armed Forces would not only aid efforts to break down class related barriers in the forces but aid our understanding of how class intersects with Service life to shape the education of Service children.

FOR THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

8. Undertake exploratory work on collecting data on the regional distribution of Service children studying at Key Stage 5/Level 3 from 16-19 in 2024.

As outlined in section 5 there is data available on the distribution of Service children across England at primary and secondary level. However, there is no data available at present on such regarding the distribution of learners at Key Stage 5/Level 3. For the purposes of enabling greater widening access work this data is crucial. Higher education providers will look very closely at the distribution of student numbers at this level when planning their work as they are closer to university entry. This is because there is a close relationship between outreach and recruitment in the vast majority of higher education providers. It is recommended that the Department for Education lead on the production of such data which can then be included in the annual Armed Forces Covenant Report.

9. Extend the Service Children Pupil Premium to Service children studying at Key Stage 5/Level 3 from 16-19 from 2024.

At present the Service Pupil Premium is only available for pupils up to age 16. However, as shown in this report, the evidence regarding the challenges that Service children face in reaching their full academic potential covers those in post 16 education as it does those at pre-16. It is recommended that the Service Pupil Premium is extended up to age 19 for all learners in full time education and training at Key Stage 5/ Level 3.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: HIGHER EDUCATION PROVIDERS WHO DESCRIBE SOME FORM OF EXISTING WORK OR INTENDED WORK WITH SERVICE CHILDREN IN THEIR APPs 2021-2024-25

Bishop Grosseteste University
Bournemouth University
Brunel University London
Buckinghamshire New University
Falmouth University
Harper Adams University
Keele University
Staffordshire University
Teesside University
The Manchester Metropolitan University
The Open University in England
The Royal Veterinary College
The University of Bolton
The University of Central Lancashire
The University of Chichester

The University of East London
The University of Exeter
The University of Lancaster
The University of Leeds
The University of Lincoln
The University of Liverpool
The University of Manchester
The University of Portsmouth
The University of Surrey
The University of Sussex
The University of Winchester
University of Chester
University of Cumbria
University of St Mark and St John
University of Suffolk



THRIVING LIVES FOR SERVICE CHILDREN



Service Children's Progression



The Service Children's Progression Alliance
is led by the University of Winchester and
supported by the MoD



Ministry
of Defence



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