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What were the processes and associated impact of making Kingston University aware of the specific educational issues of Service families?

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Abstract

The project for improving communication within Armed Forces families, which became the registered charity *Reading Force*, was founded in 2011 with the support of the Academic Development Department at Kingston University and Rushmoor Borough Council. Working with schools on its delivery to Service pupils, it was realised that understanding of particular issues and difficulties they face, the acknowledgement and effective management of which can enable them to thrive within the education system, was largely limited to teachers in schools where they were concentrated, mostly close to Services accommodation.

Various changes taking place within society, and the likely increased geographical spread of Service pupils throughout the UK, suggested that the particular needs of Service children should be embedded within initial teacher training (ITT), in order to offer parity with children with other particular educational and social needs and that higher education should be more accessible to all, including to mature students and partners of Service members.

Kingston University timetabled sessions on Service families¹ within initial teacher training and built a range of extension activities to offer a welcome to such families within higher education. This paper reports on the processes involved, their delivery and associated outcomes. It draws on a range of feedback and analysis, from questionnaires sent to participants, interviews with staff involved, and a wider circle of influencers including military units, welfare support agencies, associated charities, research organisations and university colleagues. Finally, suggestions are made for how this work could be built upon, developed and extended in future, to the benefit of all involved.

Project origins

Reading Force is based on a profound understanding of the military. The author of this paper is a Services wife, and long experience of separations and displacement, often at very short notice, had encouraged her to seek methods of inter-family communication that provided uncontroversial common ground, involving topics other than what was about to happen or already taking place.

Books form an ideal meeting point for shared-time, extending communication beyond phone calls and keeping participants in each-others' minds while all involved are reading the same book.

Reading Force, founded in 2011, grew out of this activity. Participants were encouraged to choose a book to share, commit to read it within a family group, and pool their thoughts and experiences in a bespoke reading scrapbook. The scrapbooks were funded by contributions from Kingston University and Rushmoor Borough Council, where the project began (in Aldershot, home to the British Army). The processes of project establishment and initial development are explored in two papers (Baverstock and Gordon, 2013; Baverstock, 2013).

Reading Force was, from the outset, circulated and delivered through a variety of agencies: military units, families offices, HIVES (information centres for Service families), libraries – but most importantly of all – through schools. Schools were an early means of achieving contact with Service children, and the first meeting of a group of interested teachers, in Aldershot in September 2010 identified that they would be a very important way of reaching Service pupils and encouraging them to participate. The launch for *Reading Force* was held in Wavell Secondary School in September 2011

¹ The session was called, largely for alliterative and marketing purposes, 'Understanding Forces Families'. More generally, these children are referred to in the research literature as 'Service pupils', which is the term used from here on in this paper, other than to avoid excessive repetition of 'Services', in which case alternatives are 'Forces' and 'military'.

at the invitation of the headteacher, Mrs Amanda Rowley OBE. There was representation from the county council (John Clark²), the local council (Kath O'Rourke³), the area library service (Anne Matthews⁴) local primary and junior schools⁵, as well as pupils from Wavell, the hosting secondary school.



Figure 1: The launch of *Reading Force* at Wavell School, Aldershot (2011), with children from Marlborough Infants School, Talavera Juniors and Wavell School along with school staff. Author Meg Rosoff and Captain Keith Page (staff, 145 Brigade) are in the front row, in the back row (centre) is John Clarke (Deputy Head of Children's Services for Hampshire County Council) and to his left, Hattie Gordon (*Reading Force*). Photo credit: Ray Routledge, 145 Brigade.

By 2013 28,000 reading scrapbooks had been circulated and, in the process, relationships built with many schools. While a deep empathy for, and experience of, supporting Service pupils was evident within schools where there was a concentration of military children, an awareness grew that knowledge of Service pupils within schools was generally limited to the geographical areas where they were based. Schools where Service children were in the minority tended to be interested if informed that a family within their school was from a military background, but had little specific experience in how to support or deal with them.

At the same time, *Reading Force* heightened awareness of the role teachers can play in the lives of Service children; potentially becoming the stable factor in a shifting personal environment and a key figure in their development.

The specific experience of a Service child

² Deputy Head of Children's Services, Hampshire County Council

³ Community Support Officer, Rushmoor Borough Council

⁴ Lead Advisor, Schools Library Service, Farnborough

⁵ Marlborough Infant School and Talavera Junior School

The educational experiences of all children are formative. While the particular experiences of the Service child may be felt by others, it is their combination that can mean their educational experience is more disrupted than that of their civilian contemporaries.

For example, a serving parent moving, and often at very short notice, can lead to a disruption of education and the need to move school, often in mid-term. There are periods of the Service person's career when moves may be particularly frequent, with corresponding educational disturbance. The three-teacher school year is not uncommon.⁶ Leaving a school disrupts friendships and can lead to issues of integration on arrival, particularly if the child understands that this move too will be temporary. Boarding is an option adopted by some families, but this can disrupt relationships between siblings. Even if sent to the same school, children of different ages are housed in different and educational-stage based locations, meaning that there can be little connection between a child's school community and their home life. It's not uncommon for children at boarding school to leave for the term from one home and arrive back to a different one, with no opportunity to participate in the transition, which can impact on their sense of connection with their new home.⁷

Moving to an area of high population density can mean that, on arrival, children from the same family cannot all be accommodated within the same school; so children may be spread between institutions, with an accompanying need to travel across busy neighbourhoods, and find parking, at peak times. This may have a consequential effect of making it difficult to attend parents' evenings and productions for children at different schools that happen on the same evening. Children meanwhile may be separated from their serving parents due to deployments, trainings and postings, and living through significant stress.

All these circumstances are not unique. Children with separated or divorced parents, or those with a parent who works away, may find they are in similar circumstances, but the combination of factors experienced by Service children, throughout their childhood, can be particularly stressful. Schools may find they are the connecting factor in a Service child's life, playing an important role during times of national emergency, when the location of the Service child's parent may be in the national news, and the dangerous situation being beamed to all, irrespective of the situation of their families.

Another factor which distinguishes the Service child is lack of physical connection to the wider family. Grandparents are now the most common form of childcare in the UK (Age UK, 2017) and their formative role is widely acknowledged (Uhlenberg, 2010 and others) but this is an option routinely denied to Service children, who seldom live near theirs. This may be a particular loss for younger parents who in civilian society would rely particularly heavily on their parents for support. Within the Services, once a relationship is formalised, independent accommodation is generally available. With employment opportunities for spouses limited, particularly in some areas where Service families are based, this can lead to a couple becoming parents sooner than they might do in civilian life, but without local family support. While there may be options for securing support from welfare agencies, and childcare from other Service families, there are implications for personal boundaries and privacy, which may make struggling parents reluctant to seek help. Reduced career options for Service partners, due to constant moving, shortage of jobs in specific locations, and career instability, can impact on a partner's level of satisfaction and a reduced level of family income, particularly if a partner who has formerly worked is unable to find employment in a new posting (Scarr et al, 1989; Jacob, 2008). All this can impact on family relationships and the atmosphere at home.

⁶ If you move at Christmas (not uncommon), you get September to December with one teacher, January to July with another, September onwards with a third.

⁷ A friend of the author went into hospital for the delivery of her second child and went home to another one, her husband having managed a move while she was away.

Within Service families, while all the above are felt by the families of serving personnel, they are also experienced by a much wider diaspora of others involved. These include reservists (seldom living in Services accommodation and thus prone to isolation from military support networks), injured personnel (who may be receiving long-term treatment, far from military support, with their family housed close-by for emotional support but their children's education consequently disrupted) and veterans (whose life of long-term military structures comes to an end and can be deeply missed). Also notable are the wider group of former families of Service personnel, and in particular children from previous relationships. The divorce and separation rates are higher within the Forces than within the civilian population (Rowe et al, Keeling et al). Children from previous relationships with a military person may find themselves both living with a parent who is anti-Services and deprived of the signs that affirmed they were part of the related community (e.g. being picked up from school by someone in uniform, which tends to be a mark of pride and status for a schoolchild, or living on a Services patch with the company of other children readily available).

There is a wider group too who are impacted by the movability of Service children: those they make friends with at school and can feel bereft when they move. This tendency may be worked against by civilian parents advising their children not to make friends with a Service child 'because you will only have your heart broken when they leave.' In international schools, the children of teachers can find themselves in a similar position; not fully part of the home group, as they are there because of the military, but continually being 'left' as their military friends move on.

Services families often pass under the radar

Within their immediate geographical location, the particular situation of Service families often goes unnoticed. It can be hard for a local community to realise that they are there (for security reasons, their accommodation does not feature on public mapping), and in particular to see them as individuals – rather than a collective mass. There are many reasons for this, previously explored in a published paper (Baverstock, 2016). But in summary, and from the author's personal experience, a key reason would appear to be a culture within the military of not asking for help (it being seen as weak to do so), not wishing to compromise personal confidentiality (and others knowing you have asked for help), not attracting personal attention (a career negative for the serving person) and an approach to life that can be summed up as 'just getting on with it'. So apart from appeals to the local education committee, to get children into schools close to Services accommodation, or the experience of children who have Service children as classmates, the local community may not be particularly aware of their presence.

Membership of the military often runs in families, so whereas there may be some families where 'joining up' is a tradition, and thus family members are entirely familiar with the processes involved, others will have no knowledge or experience at all (Bennett, 2014). A military career also tends to be an early choice in life. For example, the standard route to a commission is as a regular officer, and for this you need to 'be between 17 years, 9 months and 28 years, 11 months to apply. Older applicants need to be sponsored to join.'⁸

Now that both UK experience and collective memory of National Service have expired, so has tended to lapse wider awareness of the role of the Armed Services. This is represented in President Trump's bewilderment as to why anyone would want to join: 'Trump finds the notion of military service difficult to understand, and the idea of volunteering to serve especially incomprehensible.' (Goldberge, 2020).

⁸ <https://apply.army.mod.uk/how-to-join/entryoptions/officer-standard-entry>

Work done by Matt Blyton⁹ in North Yorkshire, adding a qualifying question to the biennial survey ‘Growing up in North Yorkshire’ about whether or not a respondent was from a Services background, revealed significant findings. It was found that Service children (3,600 in total, 5% of the overall population) were more likely to be carers¹⁰, more likely to feel stressed about a parent who was away, more likely to suffer an accident but less likely to seek support.¹¹

Security considerations mean that the visibility of the Services, through wearing uniform in public places, will rise or fall, but in some areas a persistent awareness of security (e.g. Northern Ireland) means uniforms may never be on display, not even hung up in the garden as washing. There has also been a reduction in the number of people serving in the Services (from 159,630 in 2014 to 149,370 in 2017).¹² With the end of the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq there is a perception that the Armed Services are no longer away on deployment, which is not the case. With lack of public visibility may go lack of awareness.

This lack of awareness was in evidence during early discussions at Kingston about whether it was relevant for the institution to be focussing on military families. Kingston is home to a large population of Services families, as it houses one of the largest military housing estates in London ('The Keep' with 200 homes). It was clear early however that this was not widely known, and a view was expressed at the first meeting that the nearest such families were in Aldershot, whereas in fact the local population included not only Kingston, but also Putney, Shepperton, West Byfleet and Hounslow – all nearer than Aldershot.

How the education of Service children, and their family integration within wider society, has been managed to date

The support of Services families falls across a range of different government departments and responsibilities, all of whom can commission specific reports.¹³ There is also involvement from specific agencies, charities (both military and for society as a whole) and other interested bodies. While this mirrors wider societal structures which are never entirely clear cut, it can arguably lead to duplications and overlaps that delay the allocation of responsibility and hence response. In this context it is worth noting that the newly established (2019) Office for Veterans’ Affairs was located within the Cabinet Office, from where it carpets coordinated support from a variety of different ministries (e.g. Defence, Education, Health and Employment).¹⁴

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) officially supports Service families through its Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP), established in 2010 to provide a single MoD focus for all issues related to service children and young people. It defines Service children as the children of serving service personnel, but the DCYP also has a responsibility for the children of MoD UK based civilians and sponsored organisations serving outside of the UK.

The work of DCYP falls in six broad areas of responsibility: strategic direction and policy; provision of high quality education in MOD schools and settings; safeguarding children and young people;

⁹ Education Development Adviser at North Yorkshire County Council

¹⁰ Matt Blyton: “‘Young carers’ were identified as those caring for parents or siblings, although the surveys were completed anonymously, so some may have interpreted things differently.”

¹¹ Schools Health Education Unit (2018). *Growing up in North Yorkshire*

¹² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/579773/number-of-personnel-in-uk-armed-forces/>

¹³ For example, the House of Commons Defence Committee commissioned a briefing from the National Audit Office on the education of Service children in 2013 (National Audit Office, 2013).

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-veterans-affairs>

supporting the Armed Forces Covenant; direct support and advice to service families with advice on a wide range of education matters and educational psychology and social work services¹⁵

In January 2019, the then Defence Secretary, The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, commissioned Andrew Selous MP to conduct an independent review to consider the diverse needs of Service families, assess whether the current support offer is meeting these needs, and make recommendations accordingly. The focus of this review was on currently Serving personnel, including those preparing to leave the Armed Services, and their families. Their findings were published in June 2020 as ‘Living in our shoes’¹⁶ (Selous, Walker and Misca, 2020).

A report with such a wide brief, covering so many areas and with its outcomes relevant to so many areas of policy and practice was eagerly anticipated. The DCYP is now part of the process to review the recommendations and assess their associated response. It is worth noting that much of the work the DCYP has done in the past few years, including devolved administration work and collaborations with key partners, was recognised and continues to be required. The DCYP has developed a good relationship with Department for Education, other government and Ministry of Defence departments as well as other stakeholders. As regards research, the DCYP works in collaboration with Services Children in Progression (see on) to seek answers to their questions about the lives of Service children, but also commissions enquiries of their own. For example, they are currently waiting for results from a UK literature review around service children which mirrors an international review SCiP are involved with.

The Service Children’s Progression (SCiP) Alliance¹⁷ is a partnership of organisations focused on improving outcomes for children from Armed Forces families. It is hosted by the University of Winchester and supported by the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The Alliance supports education practitioners to champion the progression of the children of military personnel, so that they can make informed and confident transitions through further and higher education into thriving adult lives and careers. The SCiP Alliance does this by leading collaborative work to develop a robust evidence base, connect and support practitioners and influence the policy environment.

In bringing together researchers, practitioners and policy makers, the Alliance enhances the knowledge, action and environment needed to help Service children thrive. The Alliance connects its members through a UK-wide network of research-practice Hubs, centres of collaboration, where professionals supporting Service children share challenges, solutions, knowledge and action and benefit from the network’s expertise and experience. The Alliance works closely with SSCE Cymru in Wales, SCISS in England and RCET in Scotland.

McCullouch and Hall (2016), reflected on ‘the emergent outcomes of research into the progression to higher education of children from military families (hereafter service children), underpinned ethically by articles 28 and 29 (right to education and goals of education) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The scarcity of both literature and previous research in this field indicates the importance of the work.’ They drew attention to various ‘distinctive constraints that they face, including frequent mobility and family separation, resulting in a high risk of emotional, behavioural and attainment problems. These precipitate a loss of personal agency, leading over time to the erosion of ambition to remain in education.’ The report’s recommendations included ‘professional development for schools, further education and universities following actions and recommendation from relevant authoritative bodies.’ This research established the low HE participation rate for

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/directorate-children-and-young-people>

¹⁶ From the Introduction to the review summary, page 3

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/895237/Living_in_our_shoes_Summary_1_embargoed_30_June.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.scipalliance.org/about/information-page>

Service children, drew attention to the need for systematic monitoring of progress, and provided the foundation for the SCoP Alliance. A further paper (McCullouch, Hall and Ellis, 2019,) addressed the identity characteristics of children in military families and the conceptualisation of their educational experience.

The Alliance has commissioned further research, brought researchers together in symposiums and conferences and published a series of research briefings making academic evidence accessible to practitioners and policy-makers. In 2020 the Alliance published the 'Listening to Learn' report (Hall, 2020), the culmination of a year-long programme of investigation to improve understanding of how those supporting the children of armed forces families and veterans put children's voices at the heart of all they do.

The English Office for Students' recognition of the need for HEIs to support Service children's access and participation, combined with the Alliance's work raising awareness among HEIs, has led to an 89% increase in the number of HEIs addressing Service children in their Access and Participation plans. 66 HEIs have committed to work supporting young people from Armed Forces families in their 2020-25 plans.

The Alliance's stakeholders told them that CPD resources for teachers were a priority need. In response, the Alliance, with funding from six Uni Connect HE partnerships, commissioned research by the University of Derby which provides a robust evidence base to support the development of an improvement framework, a set of principles and self-reflection questions providing a simple way for schools to identify improvement priorities and strategies for their work supporting Service children (Burke et al, 2019) The research comprised a literature review, a survey of 479 schools educating Service children and in-depth qualitative case studies involving focus groups and interviews in six schools with Service children enrolled. The Alliance developed the framework into the Thriving Lives Toolkit which was piloted by the Uni Connect partnerships in schools in 6 areas across the country. Pilot schools suggested a need for further resources to go to once they've considered the questions in the framework so the Alliance worked with partners such as SSCE Cymru and RCET to develop a set of animations introducing the Toolkit and each principle, a more detailed training module for each of the 7 principles and a set of school case studies. The Toolkit will be embedded in schools through a series of teacher training conferences, funded by the Education Support Fund. The Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund has funded a major project to conduct research in Scotland and Wales and to develop the toolkit into an interactive online tool.

There has also been significant progress around the education of Service children in Scotland. In 2018 Moira Leslie, Education Manager for the Royal Caledonian Education Trust (RCET), piloted a project with the University of the Highlands and Islands as part of their distance learning pre-service teacher training programme. This was accessed by students and tutors in 12 campus locations across the Highlands of Scotland and was very well received. She was then asked to develop this into a package which could be offered to other colleges and universities.

In collaboration with Education Scotland and the National Transitions Officer she is currently working on an on-line Learning Activity which can be used as part of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes or as Continuous Professional and Leadership Development (CPLD). This will offer eight learning activity steps, highlighting some of the issues around Armed Forces family life. This will be made available on the Education Scotland GLOW website¹⁸ and on the RCET website.¹⁹ It is hoped that this will serve as a basic introduction to Armed Services issues and will set the scene for the SCoP

¹⁸ <https://glowconnect.org.uk/>

¹⁹ <https://www.rcet.org.uk/>

Alliance's *Thriving Lives Toolkit*²⁰ to build on this to develop a much more detailed and comprehensive training package for dissemination across Scotland.

Within Wales, the educational support of Service children is looked after by Supporting Services Children in Education in Wales (SSCE Cymru). Activities are related to the three elements of their mission: Knowledge and evidence (to coordinate research and compile evidence on the experience of Service children in education to ensure their needs are well understood); Activity and resources (to collaborate with members of the SSCE Cymru Network to conduct activities and produce resources that will help support Service children throughout their education) and Supporting policy and systems (to work with organisations to provide evidence and impact policy relevant to supporting Service children in education). Their programme manager, Millie Taylor, is currently working with colleagues across the UK as part of the CPD 'Task and Finish Group' to help map out what training resources and materials are available to school staff. At the beginning of this year she launched the *SSCE Cymru School Toolkit*²¹, which she plans to translate into an interactive digital training package in 2021. Her team at SSCE Cymru has recently grown, with the introduction of four regional school liaison officers²² to support activities focused on supporting schools to understand the experiences and needs of Service children and embed activities that will ensure sustainable support systems.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education²³ says that:

Schools are aware of the unique lifestyle of services families and are briefed regarding the cycle of deployment...School staff understand the concerns of Services children and will help and support them to settle into their new school, make new friends and, in some cases, help them adapt to a different curriculum or even a new language.

Schools who have Services children enrolled may be entitled to receive a small amount of additional funding.

But the onus to seek help and support is on the parent: 'It is therefore helpful for you to inform the school if you are a member of the Armed Forces, so your child and the school can receive adequate support.'²⁴

How well Services children do perform is not straightforward. Despite the perception that children from Service families perform less well than children from non-military backgrounds, the OECD's PISA assessment shows military children perform just as well at Key Stage 1, 2 and GCSE.

²⁰ <https://www.scipalliance.org/thriving-lives-toolkit> Launched at the SCiP conference, 20th October 2020

²¹ <https://www.sscecymru.co.uk/toolkits/schooltoolkit/default.htm>

²² <https://www.sscecymru.co.uk/sscecymru/engagingwithsscecymru/default.htm>

²³ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-service-personnel>

²⁴ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/children-service-personnel>, fourth paragrp

	Mathematics	Science	Reading
Service children	497	517	491
Non-service children	491	503	495
Difference	+1.2%	+2.8%	-0.8%
UK average	492	509	498
OECD average	490	493	493

Figure 2: Performance of Service children in comparison with UK average, 2019 (Beech 2019)

Differences occur when parental rank is taken into consideration, with children of officers achieving higher grades than those of lower ranks (Beech, 2019).

	Mathematics	Science	Reading
Children of officers	517	539	517
Children of non-commissioned officers	456	473	440
Difference	+13.4%	+14.0%	+17.5%

Figure 3: A comparison of the educational performance of Service children, by parental rank (Beech, 2019)

The Office for Students draws to the attention of those developing Access and Participation plans a wider set of student groups where national data indicates there are particular equality gaps and support needs that can be addressed and this information has been shared by UCAS.²⁵ These groups include carers, people estranged from their families, traveller communities, refugees and children from military families. These they refer to as ‘under-represented’ and more information is available on the effective practice section of the departmental website.²⁶

The Department for Education is similarly interested, although preparing teachers to meet the needs of Services children would come under their determination to secure ‘minimum expectations for the professional practice and conduct of teachers’ rather than any specific targeting of particular sector

²⁵ <https://www.ucas.com/providers/good-practice/emerging-cohorts/service-children#three-key-challenges-for-service-children>

²⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1413599d-37bc-42ae-938a-d760d98c285b/regulatory-advice-6-how-to-prepare-your-access-and-participation-plan-guidance.pdf> [Accessed 24th April 2020]

requirements.²⁷ The Ofsted Report ‘Children in Service Families’ (2011) looked at the quality and impact of partnership provision for children in Services families but did not mention teacher-training.

The move from local authority control of schools towards Academy status means that centralised attention by the local education authority, to the specific educational needs of a mobile Services population, may be harder to achieve. In 2018 The National Audit Office calculated that 35% of all schools had become academies.²⁸ (National Audit Office, 2018) The process of securing educational services by Service families will arguably consequentially become much more complicated, with incoming Services families needing to make applications to lots of schools rather than relying on local government support to find them places.

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner produced a useful report (‘Kin and Country’, 2018) which drew attention to specific issues of Service children, recommending a ‘child-focused approach to supporting military families that takes into account the complex challenges that are inevitably part of growing up in an Armed Forces family’.

They placed useful emphasis on the experience of being the ‘only service child’ in a school, or attending a school with a very small number of service children:

‘It felt really different because like there was no-one you could relate to or talk to about what was happening, because if you talked to a teacher about it they would have no clue. They don’t know how the children feel because they only know what children that don’t have their parents in the services really feel.’ (10 yr old girl)²⁹

The report also made a valiant attempt to try to establish how many Service children there are in the UK:³⁰

Currently, because it is not mandatory for serving personnel to ‘declare’ their children, we do not know the exact number of service children in education. MoD personnel records and other sources of data have identified anywhere between 38,000 and 175,000 dependants of military personnel in education.³¹ In 2009, ‘The Overlooked Casualties of Conflict’ report from The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Fund gave a figure of 174,341 service children, derived from a question in a MOD survey.³² There is a ‘service child’ indicator in the School Census, primarily in order to accurately allocate the Service Pupil Premium, and in

²⁷ Letter of Nick Gibb MP to Oliver Colvile MP, 20th April 2016, in response to an enquiry about how teachers are trained to understand the needs of Service children.

²⁸ Academies are publicly funded independent state schools. In January 2018, 7,472 of the 21,538 state-funded schools in England (35% of all state-funded schools) were academies.

²⁹ *Kin and Country*, page 8

³⁰ *Kin and Country*, pages 17-18. Not knowing how many Service children there are is a real problem. As Services personnel are not required to centrally register their families’ details, there is no accurate centralised information on how many there are. 130,000 does however offer a widely accepted total. This lack of data compares markedly with the US military, where the Office of the Secretary of Defense, within the Department of Defense, houses a unit for family support. All Service personnel are required to list their dependents, and an updated mailing list and records are maintained. From first-hand experience, this can result in some surprising events, such as – during my husband’s deployment within a US unit – getting letters from my husband’s commander thanking me for my service on both our wedding anniversary and my birthday.

³¹ <http://www.rnrmchildrensfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Children-in-Service-families.pdf>

³² http://rnrmchildrensfund.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/overlooked_casualties_of_conflict_report.pdf

2016, it included 68,771 pupils.³³ Some discrepancy is to be expected as not all service children are in the state education system.

They looked forward to:

A more detailed Common Transfer Form (CTF) from September 2018 will include improved information on service children changing schools. Providing teachers with the opportunity to detail concerns over mobility, deployment and separation will enable schools to provide tailored support for new pupils. This should aid the effective transfer of information, improving concerns over the use of the PIP, which are not routinely used. Often, schools do not have processes in place to complete or receive them, and they are filled in inadequately or are significantly delayed.³⁴

And made useful recommendations around mobility affecting the education of Service families:

While the Ministry of Defence (MoD) have a range of policies to minimise disruption to family life, we found confusion as to how they operate in practice. The MoD need to increase awareness of these policies amongst parents and senior staff, particularly around the procedures in place to minimise educational disruption (such as avoiding moves in a GCSE year). This should include improved advice to parents about informing their children's school when they are deployed.³⁵

There is however an issue that while policies and documentation can be developed with the best of intentions, in practice Service families may delay informing schools that a child is leaving because they have no wish to foreshorten their time at a particular school. From first -hand experience, it is not uncommon for posting dates or locations to be changed, and a parent does not want to unsettle their child, or risk their school place being reallocated, before they are certain the move will happen. A teacher announcing to a class that a member will be leaving, and another arriving in their place, can leave a child feeling displaced before their time to go has arrived.

The report also drew useful attention to the difficulties of raising a child with particular educational needs within the Forces, referencing the National Audit Office's 2013 study into the education of service children, 73% of respondents who had children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) reported difficulties related to their children's special educational needs.³⁶ In practice, parents with such children generally seek to remain in accommodation close to where their needs have been met, and will turn down the opportunity to move, particularly overseas, where support for Service children in international schools does not include provision for special educational needs. This has direct consequences for the Service person's career progression and some will make a choice to leave as a consequence.

Overall, the report concluded that 'many of the children in the study had developed very effective coping strategies. The vast majority of service children we spoke to during this project were happy, resilient and incredibly proud to have a parent serving in the Armed Forces.'³⁷ There were however issues about how the children recruited to take part in the research represented the population of

³³ https://www.winchester.ac.uk/media/content-assets/documents/UoW-research-paper_Further-and-Higher-Progression-for-Service-Children.pdf

³⁴ *Kin and Country*, Page 17.

³⁵ *Kin and Country*, page 18.

³⁶ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/10145-001-The-Education-of-Service-Children.pdf>

³⁷ *Kin and Country*, page 1 (Introduction by Anne Longfield OBE)

Service children as a whole, the relatively small cohort interviewed (40)³⁸ and the methodologies of research. A longer paper, with fuller details of methodology and wider referencing, has not yet been published.

Service charities (e.g. ABF The Soldiers' Charity³⁹; Royal British Legion⁴⁰) campaign for the respect and rights of Services families, speak for them on specific issues as they arise, and raise money to support them. There is extensive further fundraising, both general and specific, to support the needs of Service personnel who have been injured or the families of those killed in action (e.g. Help for Heroes⁴¹; Defence National Rehabilitation Centre – DNRC⁴²). The Services also attract interest from charities serving wider society (e.g. MIND⁴³ and The National Literacy Trust⁴⁴). The Children's Society⁴⁵ has looked into the role of Service children as carers, highlighting the lack of data on either the prevalence of young carers who are service children or their needs.⁴⁶ Most such charities are members of Confederation of Service charities (Cobseo⁴⁷), the organisation that represents charities whose primary objects support the Armed Forces community, with associate and affiliate membership available to organisations who support the Services, but in addition to other constituencies.⁴⁸

There is a group of teachers concentrated on the needs of Services children in state schools (SCISS or Services Children in State Schools)⁴⁹, a voluntary affiliated network of state-maintained schools in England that have any number of Service children on roll. There are also Services support groups that help families negotiate both accessing provision and through particular crises (e.g. the family associations that support each service branch such as The Army Families Federation⁵⁰; the Naval Families Federation⁵¹ and the RAF Families Federation⁵²) all of which have both longstanding experience of the many educational issues raised by Service families and an education specialist to deal with them.

³⁸ The project involved interviewing 40 children in nine focus groups across the country. These focus groups took place in the following formats: 1 group of 8-9 year olds; 2 groups of 10-11 year olds; 2 groups of 11-12 year olds; 2 groups of 14-15 year olds; 2 groups of children who were mixed in age: one group with a range of children from 8 to 11 years old and one group with a range of children from 13 to 15 year olds. Source: Matt Blyton, personal email 17th October 2020

³⁹ <https://soldierscharity.org/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/>

⁴¹ <https://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>

⁴² <https://www.thednrc.org.uk/>

⁴³

https://www.mind.org.uk/?gclid=CjwKCAjwoc_8BRAcEiwAzJevtWxeXyu0K4dixmoeK3fQNOxqsAIHP9gpe5HRwwJapmf7DU4UmnRPMRoC9ZUQAvD_BwE

⁴⁴ <https://literacytrust.org.uk/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/young-carers-armed-forces-families.pdf> Quoted in Kin and Country, page 12

⁴⁷ <https://www.cobseo.org.uk/>

⁴⁸ Cobseo has 901 members (full, associate and affiliate) which represents 75% of those eligible. Cobseo do not seek to include 'heritage' (i.e. non welfare) associations and service funds whose primary function is serving the particular needs of current serving personnel within specific units. Ian Caws, Cobseo's Director of Operations commented: 'There are very few Armed Forces Charities with significant impact outside the Cobseo tent.' [Private correspondence, 23rd October 2020].

⁴⁹ [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-children-in-state-schools-handbook#:~:text=Service%20Children%20In%20State%20Schools%20\(SCISS\)%20is%20a%20voluntary%20affiliated,of%20service%20children%20on%20roll.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/service-children-in-state-schools-handbook#:~:text=Service%20Children%20In%20State%20Schools%20(SCISS)%20is%20a%20voluntary%20affiliated,of%20service%20children%20on%20roll.)

⁵⁰ <https://aff.org.uk/>

⁵¹ <https://nff.org.uk/>

⁵² <https://www.raf-ff.org.uk/>

Local government, often dealing with the particular impact of regimental arrivals and departures and associated pressures for school places and civil order, are variously informed and there is a wide range of involvements from the highly proactive councils (e.g. Rochdale, Rushmoor) to other councils who see their policies for the travelling community as equipping them for understanding the Services population. This situation was however positively impacted by gradual signature by all local authorities to the Armed Forces Covenant⁵³, so their understanding of Service families grew along with their consequential obligation to support them. Now that all local authorities are signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant, and have appointed roles to represent Service personnel, so their understanding of Service families has greatly improved.

A notable factor here is the emergence of regular commercial conferences on the subject of how local government can best manage and demonstrate their commitment to their local Services community, these sell well and are organised regularly, often indicating uncertainty about provision and an identified need for planning and to improve and share best practice within local government. It is notable from presentations observed that the involvement of councils very active in their support for Services families is often driven by individual councillors with a particular enthusiasm, and thus future momentum is not necessarily guaranteed.

Overall, while ‘Service child’ is a self-defining description, frequently mentioned by those either personally involved or managing the situation, there remains a gap between them and wider society. Research and mutual involvement are however now growing, in particular centralised, coordinated thinking is developing. The Service Children in Progression Alliance (SCiP), is bringing together research, resources and best practice to inform coordinated thinking about the longer term impact of an experience that influences a community for life, and how an increasing number of Service families in the UK will impact on both the availability and delivery local services and the wider community.

A change in the visibility of Service families

In April 2011 the Department for Education introduced the Service Pupil Premium (SPP)⁵⁴ in recognition of the specific challenges children from Service families face and as part of commitment to delivering the Armed Forces Covenant. The associated funding (initially £300, currently £310 per Services child) is available and ‘State schools, academies and free schools in England⁵⁵, which have children of Service families in school years reception to year 11, can receive the SPP funding. It is designed to assist the school in providing the additional support that these children may need’.⁵⁶ It was later extended to children whose parent(s) left the Armed Services within the last 6 years, or whose parents have divorced, or those children with a parent killed in action.

Unsurprisingly, launch of the scheme meant that schools became keen to know of Service pupils on their rolls. How to spend the money, on the general support for Service children, rather than specific individual needs, led to many schools appointing a member of staff with specific responsibility for

⁵³ <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium>

⁵⁵ Service children in Northern Ireland receive additional support under the provisions of the Common Funding Scheme. The Service Pupil Premium is not available in Wales, however there is a pupil deprivation grant which supports pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Currently there is not Service Pupil Premium for Service children living in Scotland, but the Scottish government strategy for school funding takes into account areas such as deprivation, mobility and under achievement. By registering as a Service family, this highlights clusters of mobile families and will attract more funding for the school. Source: <https://nff.org.uk/service-pupil-premium-2018/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-service-pupil-premium/service-pupil-premium-what-you-need-to-know>

Service children, either in combination with other duties (e.g. welfare or special needs) or as a fractional role. Their names ('Service Children's Champion', 'Forces Ambassador')⁵⁷ varied but their function was generally consistent, to identify Service children and offer specific and informed support. Encouraging these individuals to take on a coordinating role for *Reading Force* was a natural next step and many fruitful collaborations developed. This was built on with a roadshow, taking author Tom Palmer and the Manager of Premier League Reading Stars (NLT) Jim Sells, and *Reading Force* materials to ten schools with a high density of Service pupils, supported by Arts Council funding (April 2015).

Alongside SPP, a Pupil Information Profile (PIP) was introduced in 2014⁵⁸ to ensure a comprehensive transfer of information between schools for mobile service children. Whilst recommended and referred to in the SEND Code of Practice, the use of this transfer document is not mandatory. In practice, Service families may themselves intentionally undermine its delivery, by not informing schools of an impending departure of their child(ren) until relatively late in the process (see page 11, paragraph 4).

Finally, the educational outcomes of Service children, and their passage into higher education, is also attracting consideration. In 2018 Lt General Richard Nugee, then Chief of Defence People, Ministry of Defence, wrote to all UK university Vice Chancellors. He commented on the relatively lower numbers of those from Service background entering higher education and expressed the wish that universities would seek to support those who had fractured educational experiences to date, perhaps by reconsidering their entry tariffs.

An opportunity to change the narrative

Extending understanding of Service pupils to a wider range of teachers also offered the chance to isolate the positive attributes of Forces families and the value they offer to the economy and wider society, rather than concentrating on the disruption that comes from such families coming and going. Service families are prompted to develop a range of aptitudes and skills to cope with an environment of change (e.g. self-reliance, a willingness to get involved, focus on achievements within specific periods of time, adaptability and flexibility, innovation and creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving), and these match closely with how futurologists describe the workforce needed in the future (e.g. Deloitte, 2019). The depiction of Service children as innately resilient has been resisted by researchers, as resilience has to be learned rather than inherited, but there is certainly overlap between the type of behaviours promoted by a Service childhood and those looked for by future employers. This has been confirmed anecdotally by those with first-hand experience of Service family members as colleagues:

'One of the best colleagues I've worked with was the daughter of a senior soldier. We often talked about her childhood. Clearly this was not without its disadvantages: anxiety about the safety of a parent, regular changes of school, home and country, being on best behaviour because of her father's rank but she was the most flexible, adaptable and realistic of women.'

Her ability to connect with people of every background was astonishingly good because she was prepared to make the effort it takes to fit in. She and her sisters, and their mother, had always needed to be a strong team in her father's frequent absences so she knew how to work successfully and happily with other people, particularly in adversity. She retained her intellectual independence but was not too proud to take instruction and make sure it was

⁵⁷ This comes from feedback we seek within *Reading Force*'s ongoing monitoring of agencies through which materials are distributed.

⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-information-profile-for-military-service-children>

properly carried out. She could also maintain utter confidentiality without alienating her peers.

One can attribute all these things to strength of character and innate personality in part, but many of them must be strongly associated with being from a Forces background. She knew what soldiers did, and saw, and how they are trained, and therefore had a sense of proportion about life in a comfortable office!' Hilary Murray-Hill, CEO, Hachette Children's Books.

Service families also have a tendency to be proactive, and get involved:

'I don't know what we would do without the regular injection of Forces families into our school community. They tend to be people who spot needs and, crucially, decide to get involved and do something about them, always focussed on the time available – before they have to move on. And our children, who have largely been born locally and never moved house, benefit from seeing how their contemporaries manage change.' Former classroom teacher and now Head of Special Needs, primary school with a large Forces estate within its catchment area

Why seek to embed this within initial teacher training?

Previous experience as a publisher, seeking to establish key texts as professional essentials, had led to an understanding that the materials students use while on their courses can become life-long preferences.⁵⁹ Students who have used a particular resource while studying, particularly if it is tied to assessment materials, are likely to remain loyal to it in future. It followed that seeking to influence the thinking of teachers in training would impact on their understanding of Service families and influence how they sought to support them during their subsequent professional career.

Persuading a university to include the particular needs of Service children within ITT programmes

This took a long time. An approach to Kingston, to encourage them to feature the needs and issues of Service children within the PGCE curriculum of their School of Education was met with interest, but a response that the curriculum was already replete with formal module teaching as well as pre-established regular lectures and seminars. Universities tend to work a long way ahead – because anything added to the course requires pre-evaluation for likely quality and significant supporting administration. A useful ally was however found in Associate Professor Andy Hudson, Head of Kingston's School of Education, who had developed a useful relationship with Professor Marsha Lupi of the University of North Florida, who had for several years run a module for students of Education on the specific needs of Service children: 'Strengthening pre-service teachers' effectiveness in working with military-connected students and their families.'

⁵⁹For example, working on the marketing and distribution of *UK GAAP* (written by an authorial team at Ernst & Young) for Macmillan, a campaign was developed that offered half-price copies to all students of Accountancy, and supporting free copies, assignment materials (including marking guidelines) and display materials to their lecturers. This led to significant sales – but more important to the habit of consulting the text, which it was anticipated would be career-long. It is still a strong seller, now published by Wiley.

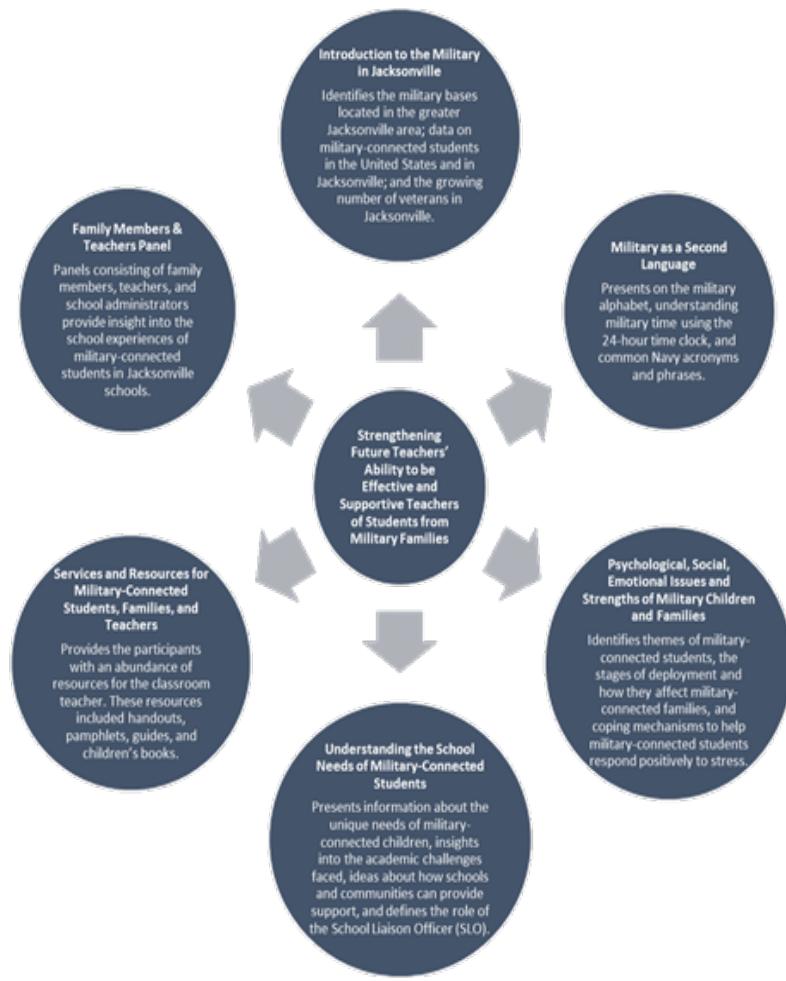


Figure 4: Strengthening pre-service teachers' effectiveness in working with military-connected students and their families. Programme summary provided by Professor Lupi (permission sought along with better copy)

Professor Hudson made an introduction, teaching materials were shared, and working group was established consisting of Alison Baverstock, Andy Hudson, Oliver Colvile MP⁶⁰, Kathy Wood⁶¹, and Wendy Searle.⁶² A meeting in April 2016 and again in the House of Commons planned the embedding of Service children within the PGCE curriculum in Kingston. There were two aims:

1. To discuss the viability and possible effectiveness of an addition to programmes of teacher education to inform students of the special needs and issues of Forces families.
2. To consider how such a programme might be piloted, developed, disseminated and costed.

Enthusiasm was strong and a date for delivery of a session for Kingston students on the particularly needs of military children was scheduled. This initial planning was however disrupted by changes in management structure and a new role for Professor Hudson. A second opportunity to host a seminar was dropped due to feedback on the National Student Survey; in response to comments about there being too many additional options and the need for curriculum-streamlining in order for students to complete their studies and assignments in the time available.

⁶⁰ Then Conservative MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, with a considerable population of Forces families within his constituency.

⁶¹ Headteacher of The Hornbill School, Brunei

⁶² Head of Communications, ABF The Soldiers Charity

In 2018, collaboration was sought again, this time through establishing a meeting with the new Head and Deputy Head of School, and with their permission setting up a meeting with Claire Jackson, Head of the PGCE (Primary) Course. She was immediately receptive, and it was agreed that the addition of this content would benefit PGCE students. It was agreed to offer a session on the particular needs of Service children within the PGCE course, and for it to be timetabled for all to attend.

Associated rationale for adding to the curriculum

A number of arguments were put forward to management for their support of this initiative:

1. Equity with other groups featured on ITT courses

While there are specialist courses for those intending to teach children with clear and defined needs (e.g. dyslexic or disabled), teachers in training on standardised courses are routinely informed about the special educational needs of a number of groups e.g. how to spot a child at risk, or a child with dyslexia, dyspraxia or particular learning needs. Given that there are an estimated 130,000 Service children,⁶³ it is fair to them and their parents, that their particular needs are brought to the attention of those likely to teach them in future.

2. An issue of likely growing significance

Service families have traditionally been accommodated close to the barracks where they serve, in housing estates provided for them (in military lingo, ‘on the patch’). The 1996 sale of Service accommodation by the Conservative Government to a private company, and its leasing back to the Armed Services at an advantageous rate, was scheduled to last 25 years (until 2021). With uncertainty about how accommodation would be managed in future, a Future Accommodation Model⁶⁴ was developed and began implementation in 2019. A range of options for Services accommodation was presented, with some housing available in traditional Forces housing, but this supplemented with the opportunity for individual military personnel to receive money for private rentals, or funding towards a deposit on a personal purchase.

For many military personnel, moving home at short notice, as part of a career in the Services, was manageable because somewhere to live was always provided. But with the likely reduced availability of military quarters, general unfamiliarity with the operations of the private rental market and the highly variable cost of buying a home depending on the location of each posting, the author of this paper anticipated that a likely outcome would be Service families opting for stability; basing themselves close to parents and grandparents, with the military partner commuting to and from their base.

This would have the likely outcome of the wider geographical dispersal of Service families, and hence more teachers and schools teaching military children. Service families are used to cluster-living. Given the strong heritability of involvement in the Services, many have grown up living on a ‘patch’ themselves, and this behaviour may continue when they leave. As evidence of this tendency, veterans tend to relocate close to each other, and there are communities that have particularly strong Forces representation, for example Wiltshire, where many Forces families have lived during their military lives, or close to Aberystwyth, which has no particular military tradition, but is an area of low house prices and a cluster of veterans has grown.⁶⁵

⁶³ See footnote 27, page 9

⁶⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-accommodation-model-what-you-need-to-know/what-you-need-to-know-about-fam>

⁶⁵ It is notable that Aberystwyth University has become a centre of research into the local veteran population.

Other factors that are augmenting the wider spread of Service families, and hence likely to impact on a need for broader understanding of their particular needs and issues include:

- **An overall reduction in the size of the Services population** and associated drawdown in previously heavily populated areas overseas, needing accommodation within the UK education system. For example, 4,000 Service families had returned from Germany to the Salisbury plain by 2017 and by 2019 the only Services school in Germany was Ramstein.
- **The move to a more stable Services population** through the establishment of super-garrisons, which locate more Service personnel and equipment in fewer locations. This will likely reduce access to boarding schools, a trend augmented through a reduction in associated funding. The argument for making a contribution to the funding of boarding school education for Service children had been that it mitigated the effects of disruption. ‘The Ministry of Defence helps to overcome this disruption by funding an allowance that is a contribution towards the cost of boarding school (it does not cover the whole cost). This allows the family to move together but for the child to have a continuous education.’⁶⁶ However, by 2019 the number of Service children attending boarding school had reduced significantly (estimated at 5% at the Cambridgeshire Service Children’s Conference, hosted at RAF Wynton, 10th October 2019).⁶⁷ Increasing numbers of Service children attending local schools will mean that the wider population will become more aware of the specific educational needs and issues of Service families.
- **Service families who opt to be stable**, and base themselves in a location away from the unit to which they are officially attached, still experience the issues relating more generally to the wider Services community and need support. This is particularly true within certain Service arms; for example, Navy and RAF families have often chosen to live in their own homes rather than in military accommodation.
- **An augmented role for reservists.** The Ministry of Defence published their future planned additional emphasis on the role of reservist in 2013 (Ministry of Defence, 2013). In the foreword to this white paper (pages 6-7) the then Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP wrote:

‘Reserve Forces make an essential contribution to delivering the nation’s security, a contribution which is growing proportionately as we restructure our Armed Forces to meet the security challenges of the future.

That is why we are revitalising our Reserve Forces, reversing the decline of the recent past, growing their trained strength and investing an additional £1.8 billion in them over ten years. ...

⁶⁶ Armed Forces Families Federation <https://aff.org.uk/advice/education-childcare/boarding/> [Accessed 03.10.20]

⁶⁷ Trying to confirm this figure proved very difficult. The Army Families Federation referred me to CEAS who replied as follows: ‘I am afraid we are unable to give you any data of the type you have requested. CEAS are an advisory service for Service parents and relevant stakeholders. We do not hold this kind of data nor can we comment on eligibility. We have no access to funding and do not authorise the Continuity of Education Allowance. As you are no doubt aware eligibility to claim CEA is the remit of the chain of Command and the PACCC, not CEAS. We also cannot provide any estimations, this would be entirely wrong and likely to be unhelpful. (Personal email received 21st October 2020).

Our reservists are essential members of our Armed Forces. They work alongside their regular counterparts to deliver the military capability the nation needs in an integrated fashion. Recognising this, we are aligning the Reserves more closely with the Regulars in all areas, including training, equipment and remuneration, while continuing to recognise the specific demands reserve service makes.'

Reservists however routinely live at home and the educational needs of their children require consideration. With partners away on exercise, or posted overseas to support the UK's defence capability, their families must carry on in locations that are often far from the unit with which their partner serves. An understanding and support structure for the educational needs of their children may be lacking.

- **The children of divorced or separated Service parents** (and the rate is higher in the Services than within civilian life) face a similar dislocation of experience and support when they leave the military community. *Reading Force* has uncovered evidence of such families being keen to maintain that part of their identity but needing additional support, as they are no longer surrounded by the day to day reminders that mentally reinforce and practically support their status.
- **Veterans⁶⁸ leaving the Services locate variously**, arriving where they can either find or afford to fund accommodation and educational provision for their families. These relocating families are marked by the experience of being in the Services, and have associated attitudes and competencies, but in their new locations may find few supporting structures or assistance.

The term 'veteran' should not imply retirement – the Services have many formal leaving points, the *oldest* of which is 55, and many of these departing families still have children of school age. *Reading Force* has received book requests from veterans with children of all ages. In 2019 the Ministry of Defence considered the projection of veterans in GB by 2028; they predict that around 44% of veterans will be of working age 16-64, 56% will be retirement age 65+ (Ministry of Defence, 2019).

All these developments mean that UK residents, often long established in their neighbourhoods and with associated expectations about the availability of educational routes and opportunities for their families, will experience increased pressure in accessing educational services from their local schools for *their* children; long term expectations will be disrupted. Similarly, an influx of Service families will mean that local school management and local government, in general previously unfamiliar with the nature and specific issues of Services life, will have to cope with the associated behavioural and community-relations issues that are likely to arise.

Some of these appear small but can have strong consequences within a community where access to school places is under pressure. As examples of this in practice, places in the football team, on school trips or in school productions, where those within the school for longer are perceived to have an enhanced right to places, can become boiling points.

⁶⁸ 'Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in Her Majesty's Armed Forces (Regular or Reserve) or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.' Ministry of Defence: Veterans: Key facts (2017).

3. Improving employability of NQTs

Another argument in favour of embedding the issues and needs of Service children within ITT was that it extended the employability of Education students. Information on a teaching applicant's CV that a student has studied the particular needs of a group which is highlighted for special attention by the Department of Education may advantage a job application.

Longer-term, considering Service pupils may suggest career paths previously unconsidered. Applications to work in Services schools overseas have to be supported by two years' teaching experience, but raising the prospect of an international teaching career early in the awareness of teachers in training can suggest interesting future opportunities.

4. Promoting institutional civic connectivity

Finally, raising awareness of the particular needs of a specific group, strongly represented within the immediate community, develops local connectivity and arguably empathy with those involved. With universities charged to become civic institutions, connected to their community, making a link with the local military population was arguably appropriate.

It was suggested that embedding the needs of Service children within ITT could become a USP for the institution involved, and part of the defining brand of Kingston's School of Education. Colleagues within Kingston's School of Education were encouraged to take ownership of the initiative, with an invitation to attend being sent to local schools who support Kingston placement students, and the event offered more widely to Services structures and families. The Head of School was briefed to introduce the event and their Events Coordinator dealt with local press and relations. Subsequently, the programme as a whole, and all involved, were listed (and shortlisted) within a nomination for the Times Higher Education's 'Widening Participation' category for the 2020 THE awards. A group photograph (via zoom) and associated institutional communications drew attention to the School's achievement in starting something new.



Figure 5: The team shortlisted for the THE Award. From top left to bottom right: Clare Beckett, Director of UK Student Recruitment; Fiona Maxwell, Reading Force; Keith Brennan, University Registrar; Jenni Woods, Head of Access, Participation and Inclusion; Laura Bryars, Administrative Assistant, The KU Big Read (2016-18); Alison Baverstock; Jackie Steinitz, Research Director, The KU Big Read; Claire Jackson, Head of Primary PGCE, Kingston University; Hattie Gordon and Elaine Boorman, Reading Force; Anastasiya Stravolemova, Events and Engagement Coordinator,

Faculty of Health, Education and Social Care, Kingston University; Kelly Squires, The KU Big Read (2019-20).

Delivery of the first seminar at Kingston

Kingston invited the London hub of the SCiP alliance to host one of their regular morning meetings on the same campus as their School of Education, and then everyone was invited to stay on for the afternoon in order to present, or be part of, the event which was offered to all Initial Teacher Training (ITT) opportunities within the Kingston School of Education, the two main ones being the BA in Primary Teaching (3 year course), and the PGCE (Early Years/Primary/Secondary). The invitation went to all course leaders but the BA timetable did not have space for the session, and the third year students, who do sometimes join the PGCE group for guest lectures, were on placement. The event was however timetabled for the PGCE students. The timetabling was a significant move, as it meant it would roll over into future years.

The approach taken by those planning the seminar was educationally broad. The underpinning consideration was that if the issues of Service children are addressed earlier in the educational system, with specific attention, their outcomes may improve in the longer-term.

The seminar posed a question for consideration beforehand (a request for students to find out about their own military connections, if any) and then offered presentations from a wide range of professionals working with Service families (policy makers, teachers, researchers, Services family support, related charities, military units, organisations representing Forces families) as well as Service spouses and children. The seminar sought to isolate the specific issues that such families face, and what can be done to support them, in order to improve educational outcomes and boost their academic aspirations. There were contributions from Diana Beech (Policy Adviser to the Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation), Rachael Gribble (SCiP London hub and King's College London), Louise Briggs (RAFFF), and Moira Leslie (Royal Caledonian Educational Trust). Messages of support were sought from key individuals:

'As a country, we ask much of those who serve in the military. They always stand ready to protect the British population, to help the civil authorities in a crisis, and to safeguard our way of life. Fulfilling that duty is often to the detriment of time with family, sometimes at short notice. Separation is tough – for those away from home – but more so for those who are left to keep the home-fires burning while carrying the burden of worry about our safety. Knowing that our families are being cared for while we are away is an indispensable part of being able to focus on our mission.'

But the military is a lot less visible than it once was and fewer people than ever have either served or know people who have served, so we find ourselves in an interesting paradox where our Armed Forces are exceptionally popular, but not particularly well understood which is an important distinction because it can result in misplaced sympathy rather than the empathy our Armed Forces and their families need. I hope we can tap into the British sentiment of being proud to support the Armed Forces in times of crisis to bring more people in touch with who we are, what we do, and why. And building understanding of what life is like for the children of military families is a great way to start.' General Sir Nicholas Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, February 2019

'The vast majority of Service children I've talked with are happy, resilient and incredibly proud to have a parent serving in the Armed Forces. Belonging to a military family was central to their identity and sense of self. However, more can be done to improve the

services that help them cope with the pressures brought about by frequent moves and parental deployment.

I want to see a child-focussed approach to supporting military families that takes into account the complex challenges that are inevitably part of growing up in an Armed Forces family. Including the circumstances and needs of Service children onto the curriculum of PGCE courses would be a huge boost to thousands of children and provide a valuable insight into their unique experience for other children.' Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England, February 2019

In addition to Kingston students, the event was offered (at no cost) to a wider audience of those interested. The afternoon was very well attended (200+), with visitors from as far away as Scotland and North Yorkshire, and since then edited versions of the recordings have been widely accessed on the university website (Kingston University, 2019).

All the presentations were well received, but arguably the most memorable section was a panel provided by local Service children and their parents. The children, from Latchmere Academy Trust⁶⁹, were vociferous in talking about their particular experiences. A much-noted comment was from a child who longed, one day, to be able to have wallpaper in her bedroom.⁷⁰

Methods of analysing feedback on the afternoon were worked into the process relatively late. Kingston students were surveyed both before and after the event, but it was not possible to establish that the cohort was consistent across the two surveys. It is however possible to say that the biggest progress towards understanding Service families and their educational needs was made by those who had the least information to start with. All participants were asked to come to the seminar having investigated Services links within their own families, these revealed some connections of which they were previously unaware. The questionnaire included an option for additional comments, and these included:

'I realise I had never asked my father or grandfathers about their military service.' (student)

'My grandfather fought in the second world war, on both sides at separate times.' (student)

'My father-in-law, (now aged 90) was a captain in the army. He served in Cyprus, Aden (where my husband was born) and Germany (left when husband was age 5). As a result of this presentation, I had an interesting conversation/debate with him about family life in the Forces and it was interesting to see how his experiences and perceptions compared and contrasted with my views and current lifestyle for Forces families.' (staff member)

'Really helpful to think about the situation of Forces children. Thank you.'

'A big salute to the Forces community for their support, service, involvement and dedication.' (student)

⁶⁹ <https://www.latchmereschool.org/> Situated next to The Keep, one of London's biggest military housing estates, Latchmere consistently has a significant number of Service children, and long experience in their support and development.

⁷⁰ This is seldom possible in Forces housing, because personal decoration needs to be removed before a 'quarter' (or home) is handed back to the authorities. So while wallpaper can be put up, if the next occupant does not want it to remain in place, it has to be taken down and the accommodation returned to its initial state – which is obviously taking a risk on the taste of future inhabitants. For this reason, many Service families stick with the standard magnolia paint, and decide not to decorate.

'I am now much more interested in the Forces community since attending this presentation.'
(student)

There were also suggestions for how the seminar could be better managed in future, notably through including strategies for teachers in how to promote inclusion and behaviour management:

I am interested in the lives of children who have parents in the armed forces. However, I feel that the day didn't address how we as teachers can facilitate their learning. The day didn't give any strategies to deal with, for example a student who is negatively affected by having a parent who is not present 24/7. It just gave the statistics and anecdotes.' (student)

Other feedback came from Kingston colleagues. Claire Jackson, Course Leader for Primary Teaching leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) PGCE, within Kingston's School of Education, commented:

'The students on the PGCE Primary teaching programme have very much appreciated the opportunity to learn about the lives of Forces families from the perspective of parents, children, policy makers, education and military professionals. The seminars held within the School of Education have supported the development of our trainee teachers, and in particular added a depth of understanding around elements of the Teachers' Standards such as creating a safe learning environment and being aware of a range of factors that influence children's development and progress.

Students also gained an awareness of the rich life experiences that these pupils might bring with them into the classroom. Feedback from the trainee teachers following the sessions indicated that they now felt better prepared to support Forces children and their families and that this would impact positively on their teaching and subsequently on each child's learning.'

Clare Beckett, Director of UK Student Recruitment commented:

'Understanding Forces Families really brought home to me and my colleagues how much more effort is needed to ensure that children of Forces Families are supported in their transition into university. We will be widening our Head Start programme to all applicants from Forces families from 2020 and are currently considering how contextual offers will improve entry rates. Our strategy to teach the future teachers will ensure the ripple effect of the sessions provided within the programme have a lasting effect both at Kingston University but with our future alumni wherever they may go on to teach. I look forward to building on this work in the future.'

The seminar also made colleagues aware of others on the staff with military experience, who had not previously advertised this, due to anticipated negative perceptions of being part of an unreliable workforce. One commented:

'We were posted to Kingston in 1992 and spent two happy years living in military housing. While we were here, our two children attended local schools and our third was born in Kingston Hospital. From here we moved on to Folkestone. Ten years later I started working for the university and have travelled to it from our various military postings ever since. The university has given me continuity in a very geographically-fragmented life. The ethos and sheer practicality of the Forces community has always impressed me, and I am proud that my institution is now highlighting Forces families as a group worthy of special attention. Prior to this seminar my colleagues didn't know of my close military connection, which I had always kept to myself, feeling that if I could manage the additional administration, it was not

relevant to anyone else. I did not wish to raise doubts about my long-term commitment to the institution.'

Other outcomes of the session (as reported by PGCE staff talking to students) included:

1. **Student employability.** Students expressed an increased understanding and enthusiasm for opportunities to work with Service families, including in international schools. Those present reported positively on learning about the particular needs of Service children within their classes and hence emerging better able to support them in future.
2. **Strong local interest.** Information on the seminar was quickly picked up by marketing/communications colleagues and featured on the university website, internal messaging and within social media. There is always strong competition for stories to be featured so this engendered pride within the School of Education.
3. **Increased awareness of the presence of local Service families among staff.** The seminar prompted attendance from staff with Service connections, in a wide variety of roles, from across the university, some confessing they had long masked this on application forms and in departmental conversations, fearing anti-Forces prejudice.

Becoming aware that the spouses of Service personnel are working within the university has attracted interest in their lives and the challenges they have faced. Revealing that while working for Kingston her husband has served in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, one staff member found colleagues fascinated by how you cope with a husband away in a warzone. Another staff member revealed that she had found the skill-set, practicality and 'can-do' of Service spouses she had worked with to be inspiring. Widening awareness of the Service community within university staffing has worked to offset this deficit model and promote an understanding of the Forces community as people who manage change effectively and can be effective and empathetic colleagues.

4. **Routes to further opening access to HE.** Within a university so committed to widening participation, Kingston's Recruitment Team responded very positively to a new awareness of the local Services population. This prompted consideration of how the special support provided for students who have not traditionally thrived within universities could be extended to support young people from Service families. The university's award-winning provision to look after those from a care background was seen as a likely starting point.⁷¹
5. **A joining up of research communities.** Advertising the *Understanding Forces Families* seminar attracted interest from staff and students within a range of disciplines, including many students working on relevant dissertations within Social Geography, Psychology, Nursing, Social Work and Journalism.
6. **Joint funding applications for research.** An invitation to the organisers of *Understanding Forces Families* was extended by Professor Mary Chambers of the Centre for Public Engagement within the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education. This has already

⁷¹ The 'Kingston University Cares' support for care leavers was highly commended at the Times Higher Education Awards in 2014. It was also part of the submission for the institution's NEON awards for Institution of the Year for Widening Access in 2016 and again in 2017. The KU Cares scheme received a further commendation at the NEON awards in 2018.

resulted in meetings to exchange ideas and the submission of shared bids for research funding, notably on the mental health of veterans in long-term residential care.

7. **MOD Policy.** Discussions subsequently took place with the Head of Families, Lt General Richard Nugee and his staff within the MOD, about how the practice established by Kingston, and now timetabled for future students, can be rolled out more widely within HE. A view is being encouraged that rather than just lowering entry tariffs for applicants from a Service background, their transition to HE needs to be considered within the context of the wider inclusion of first-generation arrivals; this is particularly relevant within Kingston's experience of widening access.
8. **Wider visibility of the conference.** Speakers were filmed and the videos made available for all interested, so those not living in the south could still benefit and learn from the day. For example, a few military mothers who were then in teaching training wanted to access the material but were unable to travel to Kingston. They have since viewed it online (Kingston University, 2019).

Delivery a second time

As the programme was timetabled for PGCE students, it was now embedded within the curriculum. With pressure on the timetable, it was moved forward from March 2020 to January 2020 – so took place just before the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020.

This time a more comprehensive questionnaire was delivered, and responded to, at the end of the session. The results were as follows:

The second delivery was timetabled for 63 students on the PGCE Primary students. Once again students were requested to complete a short survey at the end of the seminar. 49 completed questionnaires were received representing 78% of the cohort of 63. audience. Respondents were split roughly equally across three age groups: under 25, 25-34, 35+. Key findings were:

- **More than 40% of respondents did not know anyone at all in the Services:** Respondents were asked about the extent of their personal involvement with the Services by asking them to tick all those they know involved either currently serving or retired from the Services, from a list comprising self, parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, neighbours and local people. 43% of respondents had no connection at all, 22% had a strong connection (either a parent in the Services or at least 3 connections through wider family/friends/neighbours) while the remaining 35% had a limited connection (with no Service member in their immediate family but just one or two connections further afield).
- **Students found the session helpful rating it on average 5.5 on a 7-point scale:** 60% of students rated the session as very useful (scoring it at 6 or 7 on the scale) and a further 31% as moderately useful (scores 3-5). Analysis by demographic showed that students with a strong connection to the Service were particularly appreciative (average score 6.3) as were those aged

35+ (average score 6.2).

Using the seven point scale below how useful did you find the following?
(Scores 1-2 =Not at all useful, 3-5 = Moderately useful, 6-7=Very Useful)

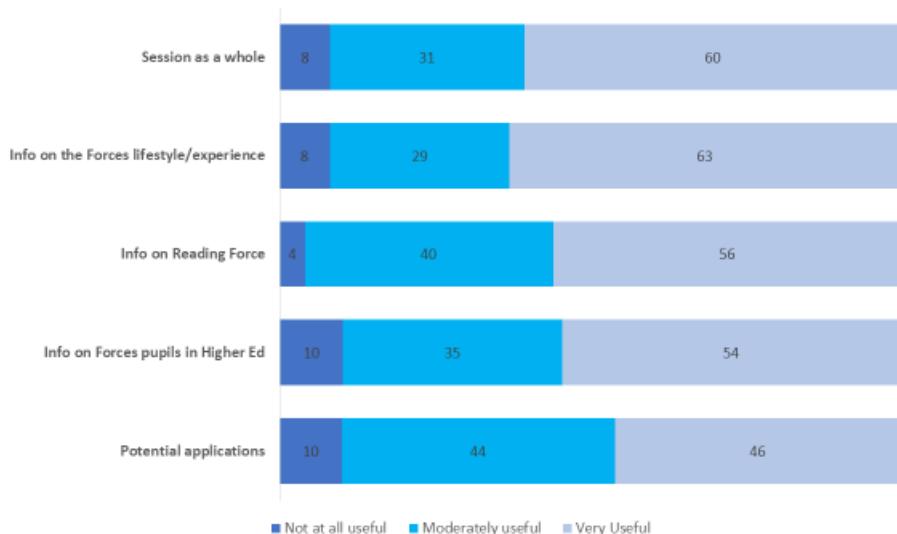


Figure 6: Usefulness of the seminar on Understanding Forces Families, January 2020, Kingston University

- **The most useful features of the session were considered to be the information provided on the Services lifestyle and experiences and the information on *Reading Force*.** Responses to rating questions about different aspects of the course were broadly similar – but the highest rated were the sections dealing with the lifestyle of the Services and *Reading Force*. The lowest rated was the section on practical aspects of support (though this was still felt to be very useful by 46% of respondents). This is a learning to be addressed in subsequent delivery.
- **The seminar was effective in increasing interest in the Services and the lifestyle of serving members and their families:** Respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in various aspects of the Services before and after the seminar using a 7-point scale. The proportion selecting the top two boxes for their general interest in the Services increased from 17% before the seminar to 42% afterwards with half the sample increasing their score from before to after. There were similar increases in the proportions who were very interested in the lifestyles of serving members of the Services (up from 24% before to 45% after) and the lifestyles of Services

families (up from 29% to 53%).

Comparison of interest in aspects of the Forces before and after attending the seminar

Q3: How interested were you in the following BEFORE you came to the seminar?
 Q5: How interested were you in the following AFTER you came to the seminar?
 7 point scale: Scores 1-2 =Uninterested, 3-5 =Moderately interested, 6-7=Very interested

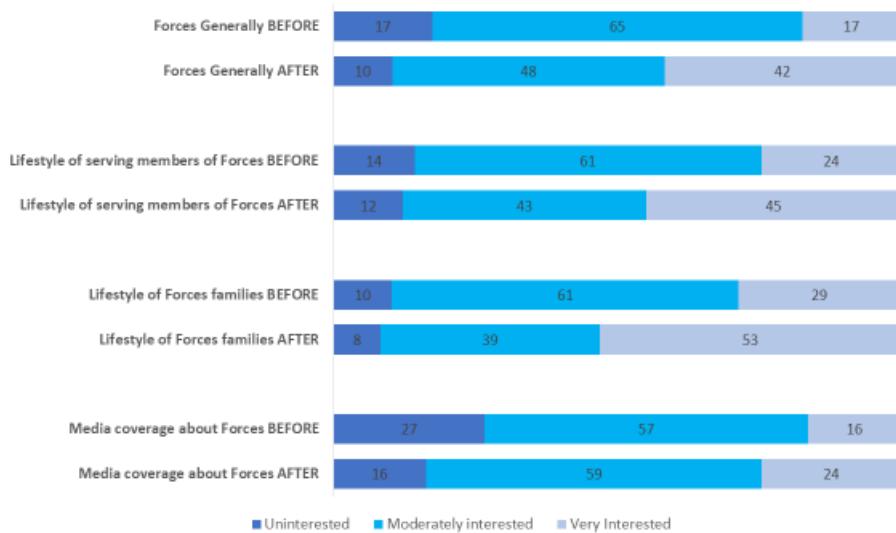


Figure 7: Comparison of interest in aspects of the Services before and after attending the seminar, January 2020

- **Responses to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey also demonstrated that the session had increased students' awareness of the issues facing Services families and their needs for additional support.** For example:

'I found this very useful. I never really thought about forces families or how it would affect their education. It has now made me keen to research more on this topic and to advocate as much support in the schools that I go to. For example, introducing 'Reading Force' to the school. Thank you!'

'[I will] find out about Forces children in my school and be attentive and empathetic towards their needs particularly now I know from research that these children do not talk about their experiences and feelings and self-regulate. Something to be mindful about in my practice.'

'It really opened my eyes to things I had not really thought about when it came to the lifestyle of forest families and things that affect them on a day to day basis.'

'It is interesting to know the kind of things that will be going on in the mind and family of Forces children. This will help me to support them in my career.'

'Gained more knowledge on how to support forces children.'

'An enjoyable and fun thanks for a good afternoon. It made me much more aware of the Forces around us.'

Suggestions for future sessions included: increased emphasis on the practical aspects of how to help Service children generally, more information for teachers on the impact of a family member's PTSD on their wider family, a video of a Forces wife/husband/partner or child talking about their

experiences being in the forces family and more feedback from a teachers working in a school with high number of Service children, to hear how they had adjusted their practice. The first delivery had included a teacher working with Service children, and offered more on cross-organisational support for them as a cohort rather than in the classroom, but it had not been possible to secure this for the second delivery.

How can this work be continued and developed?

1. Further options for student study

The broad and interdisciplinary nature of requests to join the *Understanding Forces Families* seminars is reflected in the Services being an isolatable and therefore attractive group for further study. Within Kingston there have been requests to interview the organisers from students at a variety of academic levels (undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation, PhD) and these have been responded to, as well as the signposting of others who could help.

Partly in response to this, *Reading Force* has set up a *Reading Force* Research Ambassador Scheme which seeks to offer students the opportunity to get involved in associated research projects, e.g. trialling questionnaires and commenting on ideas for new materials. In the longer term, this is seen as a CV-enhancing opportunity to mentor and offer encouragement to students at a time when work placements are rare and opportunities to network are significantly reduced.

2. Sharing with other HE institutions

Kingston have shared their programme, and the talks given during its delivery, via their website. Lockdown also offered opportunities to share with other institutions and these have been taken up where possible. For example, in June 2020 a shared seminar with Newman University was attended online and resulted in significant sharing of information. Dr Branwen Bugle, Head of Primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE), Newman University, wrote afterwards:

We invited Alison from *Reading Force* in to talk to our PGCE and final year undergraduate Primary ITE trainees at Newman University in the summer of 2020. The work that they do is close to my heart: as members of a Forces family, my own children often had to cope with separation and the disruption of moving from school to school that prompted *Reading Force*'s inception. I was very aware that not all schools understood the issues faced by force's children and felt this would be a valuable opportunity to extend our trainees' knowledge. However, there was an additional benefit this year. During the initial lockdown period enforced by the UK's response to Covid-19 I was repeatedly struck by the similarity to Forces life that the whole nation was facing. Many children were separated from beloved grandparents or extended family as restrictions meant they couldn't visit even close relatives. *Reading Force* offered a way of helping families stay in touch, and our trainee teachers could immediately see the benefit beyond supporting force's families.

After the session, I was approached by colleagues from the university to say they had gained a lot from the session as it wasn't an area they had previous experience in. Many of the trainees emailed staff to say how much they enjoyed the experience: their feedback was summed up by one of our trainees when they said, "What an interesting and informative session today, thank you for facilitating this. After the session, I thought it would be very interesting to work in a military school or teach forces children. I hope I have the chance to implement *Reading Force* as it is such a wonderful idea." Tammy, PGCE student

An invitation to offer a section on the particular needs of Service children was offered by Rachel Snape, editor of *The Headteacher's Handbook, The Essential Guide to leading a primary school* (Bloomsbury). This was accepted and will appear in the book when published in 2021.

Building on this, a seminar on recent research into the mental health of the wives of senior Services partners (Stuttaford, 2020) was hosted online, rather than in person, and attracted an international audience.⁷² Scheduling this for the afternoon, rather than as previously planned as an in person event during a regular faculty research meeting, brought in a significant audience from North America.

3. An enhanced welcome to local military communities

After the 2019 seminar, Kingston University delivered a package of information, including options for short-term study for military partners, to all residents of the local military housing estate, The Keep. The package included a letter of welcome from the Head of UK Student Recruitment, a prospectus offering information on courses available and an introduction to research projects being run within the university that demonstrate institutional commitment to the development of understanding of the Services community. It is too early to say if this has been effective; as data-capture about new students does not include 'Forces family member' as a required characteristic, it would currently be difficult to identify students recruited as a result.

While a new posting to an area with a university may offer opportunities for Service partners to learn or retrain, detailed discussions with partners from the Services community who have tried to pursue this path revealed other barriers to taking up such chances, as the following case study indicates:

Case study of military wife seeking to take up a university place

Context

Service partners tend to be effective managers and good logisticians (e.g. they often end up moving home on their own, as partners are routinely sent away on training courses just before they start a new job, for which they are being posted). But they routinely lack the continuous employment on their CVs of their civilian contemporaries. It is difficult to achieve promotion and climb a career ladder when you may be required to move at short notice. What is more, the early availability of housing within the military can mean that relationships are formalised younger than would happen in civilian life. Life on the 'patch' (military housing), often situated far from any means of employment, can mean that young wives choose to become young mothers. In this context, a case study from Aldershot is offered.

Case study

An Army wife whose husband was based in Aldershot, who had had her family young, decided to resume her education. She embarked on an undergraduate degree at a local university. From the start she did not feel particularly welcome. She was older than most of the students and as she was commuting in after dropping her children at school each morning, she found it hard to get to know people. She quickly picked up that her personal tutor was anti-military and could not (and certainly seemed to make no effort to try to) understand her particular situation. Dates for submission of course-work were naturally long established, but when these collided with key dates in her husband's deployment on active/unaccompanied duty, his RNR and post-return leave, there were no options for flexibility about hand-in. The only option available to her was to seek an 'extension' and then 'mitigating circumstances'. The words made it sound like it was her fault, and the accompanying documentation, which listed reasons for asking for a later submission date, made no reference to the kind of circumstances she was experiencing. When a repeat of these circumstances happened in her second year, due to her husband again being deployed – and so leaving her as a

⁷² <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/events/item/3633/08-jul-2020-the-impact-of-unpaid-work-on-selfreported-mental-wellbeing-how-much-commitment-is-required-of/>

single-parent, she felt there was a real sense of her ‘swinging the lead’. She was not sure she was believed.

An Army wife she met at a coffee morning, who happened to work at a university, advised her on where to seek support within the university, what kind of questions to ask, and how to write an email asking for consideration of her particular situation. Overall, however, she felt she was not particularly welcome and dropped out during her second year.

What the university where she was studying could have done better

- Been aware that as an institution they are surrounded by Services units and associated housing – and that Services families are potentially interested in HE
- Understood that as a means of social inclusion and fairer access, Service families are a government and Department of Education priority and so should be actively encouraged to access HE
- Understood that the Service families may include adults as well as young people who would benefit from a university education
- Captured information on initial registration that the student was from a Services family
- Understood something of Services life, so the consequences of an ‘unaccompanied deployment’ are understood by all staff (this habitually involves: becoming a single parent for 6-9 months; extensive family disturbance before, during and afterwards; living with location of your partner being reported in the daily news – and people telling you they ‘don’t know what the military is doing there anyway’ or ‘what do you expect if you marry a serviceperson?’)⁷³
- Made the student feel welcome rather than viewing her through individual political/social prejudice/preconceptions
- Added ‘individual stressful circumstances such as the deployment of a partner’ to the list of sample qualifying factors for mitigating circumstances

There is discussion at Kingston about whether a Services connection should be recorded when an application to university is made, as part of standard data-capture, and whether whole-institution training (perhaps via a short film) should be developed to help colleagues become more aware of their local Services communities. This could be managed in the same way that all colleagues have undertaken training in unconscious bias.

Conclusions

1. Embedding the understanding of Service families within ITT is a positive step towards improving the inclusion and educational support of military children and their longer-term educational development.
2. The process of embedding within ITT enhances the skills, understanding and employment prospects of future educational professionals. Such training raises the employability of trainee teachers, who may not realise there are interesting opportunities available. In the process, a widening awareness of the pipeline for such roles may be developed.
3. The process of widening understanding enables a repositioning of the profile of the Services, whose self-motivation, independence and strength are attractive characteristics in today’s employment market. Their first-hand experience may offer an effective demonstration of how to prepare for and manage change to those with whom they interact, even if only temporarily.
4. There is considerable scope for extending this work, through sharing the programme (offered here as an appendix, with accompanying explanatory text) and through responding

⁷³ All are valid points of view, but beyond the control of the Service partner.

- to feedback from those who have received the training (e.g. adding more on how to teach and support Service children within the classroom).
5. The Department for Education has already identified military families as a group of high priority within higher education, and opportunities for them to study and develop should be made more accessible. This could include itemising military issues within grounds for mitigating circumstances and other sustained attempts to understand a vocabulary previously unfamiliar within higher education.
 6. Supporting resources would be valuable. These could include:
 - A publication for schools/teachers on the specific challenges and opportunities that arise from being/working with Service families.
 - A flexible, deliverable resource for promoting wider understanding of Service families within education. A compilation of experiences and vocabulary that would serve as an adjunct to courses of teacher-training, offered as Continuous Professional Development to schools with little experience of Service families, and available to local government to help prepare their staff for the likely community impact of new arrivals. It would explain the issues, priorities and vocabulary of a group of which many will have had little day to day experience; in the process developing the awareness, likely empathy and employability of all involved.
 - Learning materials for teachers in schools and lecturers in higher education to accompany formative assignments, supported by video and handouts.
 - CPD for teachers delivered either on staff training days or over several weeks, in structure perhaps similar to The Alpha Course⁷⁴, materials available to support delivery in a variety of formats, including discussion.
 - Introduction of Service families as a local option for BA/MA dissertation or PhD study.

For all the above, associated funding could be sought from MOD, DCYP, Services charities and independent organisations, with the help of agencies so far involved in this work.

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Appendix 1: Draft contextual notes and programme for a session on the educational needs and opportunities of working with children from Service families

Working title: Educating Forces families, and learning from them

The context:

To date, responsibility for the educational needs of Service families has largely been concentrated in specific locations, close to units and bases, in schools with large associated populations and consequently developed expertise. There are no specific training courses or manuals for those wanting to work with Service pupils. When recruiting teaching and administrative staff for such institutions, schools often stress the need for ‘an understanding of the issues of Service families’ and find this is usually located either in those with experience in a similar school, or prior personal experience, most usually gained either as the child or spouse of Service personnel. The availability of secondary education through overseas Services schools in locations of high Services populations, and subsidised places for children of secondary school age at UK boarding schools, have led to reduced demand from UK-based Services families for children post-11. However, the drawdown of overseas troops, and likely increased geographical spread of military families within the UK, mean a rise in the number of Service children in UK schools can be anticipated.

Aim of this initiative:

This project proposes an educative and developmental package for education professionals and those with an interest in supporting schools that explains the particular circumstances, priorities and likely attitudes of Service families, and considers how their integration within the education system can best be managed. It also proposes wider consideration of the factors which shape Forces families, the aptitudes and attitudes (e.g. geographical flexibility, self-motivation and independence) required to cope with prolonged separations and an ongoing requirement for geographic flexibility, and associated opportunities for wider society to both learn and benefit from them. Overall, the project seeks to harmonise relationships between a group that has often been characterised as distinct and separate, and whose effective incorporation within wider society is becoming an increasingly significant social issue.

Suggested format for delivery

This need not be a long addition to existing programmes of teacher education; arguably a single half-day session, concentrating on the specific experiences and needs of the Service community, could have a significant impact on both student and staff perspectives. It would ideally feature:

- Podcasts/short films interviewing a range of individuals: serving personnel; families; welfare workers; teachers; older Service children looking back on what was got right/wrong in their education
- Practical and involving exercises to offer a taste of the experience of Services families (e.g. delegates being handed a letter requiring them to exchange places at short notice, having chosen their preferred seats and surroundings)⁷⁵
- A live contribution. A first-hand presentation from a representative from the Services (personnel/partner/children)
- Opportunity for reflection and discussion

Key suggested elements:

1. **Introduction to and overview of the Services community**
 - The size of the population

⁷⁵ This idea comes from Marsha Lupton. It was incorporated within Kingston’s seminar and proved very effective.

- Categories of individual; families and other dependents involved (regular/full-time; reservist/(part-time); veterans (often not as old as this sounds); the widowed/bereaved; wider families e.g. grandparents and uncles/aunts/cousins; former families (through divorce/separation)
- Specific experiences of Service families. Average number of moves/schools per child/family; frequency of participation in higher education; rates of separation and divorce; average age on establishing relationship and having first child.

2. First-hand feedback from those involved: the active issues for Services families

- A general climate of uncertainty: changed postings; sudden personal crises within this context (e.g. illness or loss of family members); loss of contact with wider family – the service as ‘the family’ – implications for wider biological family, especially grandparents
- Impact of being ‘in the news’ with no ability to respond publicly
- Living alongside work colleagues – the pressures of doing so (e.g. lack of privacy)
- Moving schools; friendships being disturbed
- Leaving schools (behaviours schools don’t anticipate, e.g. often families don’t tell schools of plans to move as postings can change at the last minute and they don’t wish to lose their places)
- Disruption to health care (finding a dentist; special educational needs)
- Promotions, particularly when across military divides (e.g. from Staff Sergeant to most junior Officer, which involves a house move and significant status change)
- Blended families (divorce rate is higher within Service families than civilian life)
- Leave at odd times, often mid-term (e.g. post-and pre-deployment)
- Careers for wives/partners and the impact this has on the family
- Retirement/redundancy (more change, may feel forgotten about)

3. Practical exercise: What are the benefits and likely consequences of having Services families involved in a school?

Positives: proactive community; reliable and time-orientated when helping permanent residents achieve planned goals e.g. on action committees and PTAs; adding lived experience of the effective management of change to the experience of others; broadening of local perspectives.

Opportunities for exploration and further development: the impact on children left after friends move on (including teachers’ children in international schools).).

4. Specific issues for particular Services/communities (this to include local customisation)

- Local bases
- Areas of operation
- Significant associated history

5. A guest speaker

Various Services charities might be keen to secure involvement. Local units have within their brief the establishment of good community relationships and so could be approached. Local schools could be approached for parents/Service children to take part. There is unlikely to be an associated cost, although offering parking might prove a significant attraction.

6. How can teachers help?

Contribution from an education professional on how teachers can best support Service children. Strategies for class management and individual needs; pastoral support

7. Getting the vocabulary right

- Consideration of the manner of communication within the military (inclined to be abrupt; forceful; decision-orientated; rank-aware)

An informal quiz to finish off the day

- Special vocabulary ('the patch', 'padbrats', 'tactical inducement'; 'friendly fire' etc)