

RESEARCH ON SERVICE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER
EDUCATION:
STRENGTHS, NEEDS, BARRIERS

SCiP Alliance Annual Conference, Cardiff, November 2024



WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

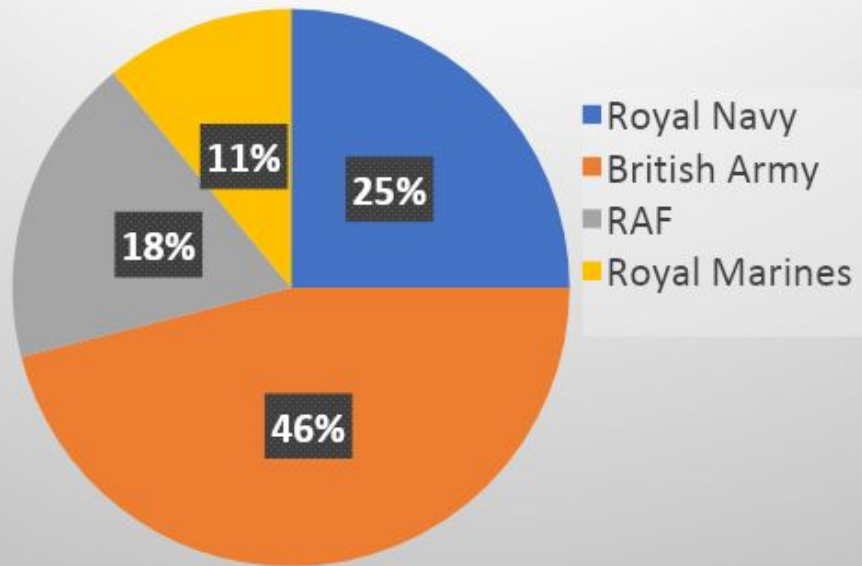
- Present findings from research into the experiences of service children in Higher Education
- Identify strengths, needs, and barriers faced by these students.
- Discuss implications for creating inclusive, targeted support in Higher Education.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

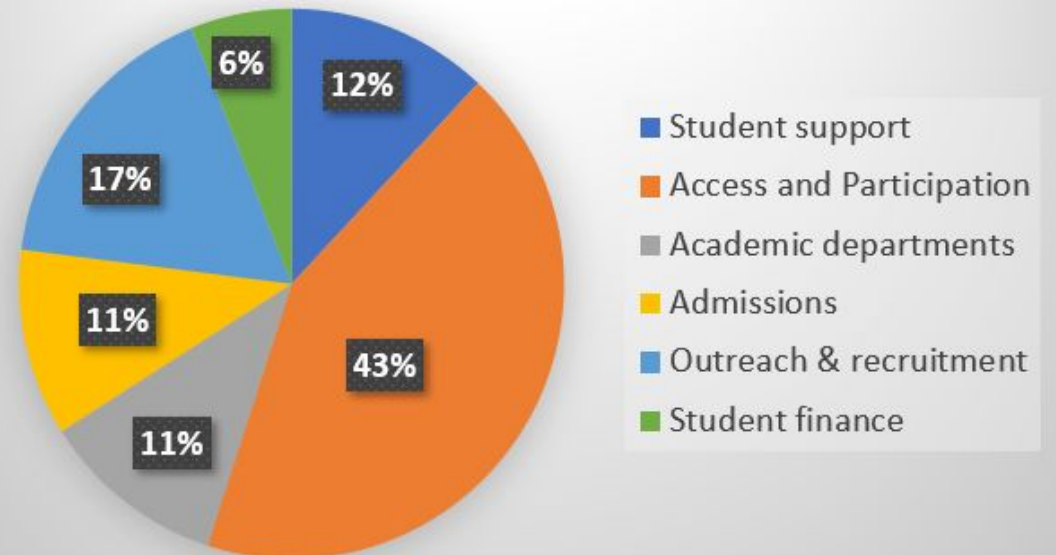
- **Purpose of Research:**
 - Understand experiences of service children in HE to develop an evidence-based Toolkit for support.
- **Methods:**
 - Integration of quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups.
- **Participants:**
 - 250 survey responses (200 students, 50 HE staff)
 - 73 HE institutions across UK nations
 - 45 in-depth interviews/focus groups (25 students, 20 Wider Stakeholders)

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Student Responses



Staff Responses

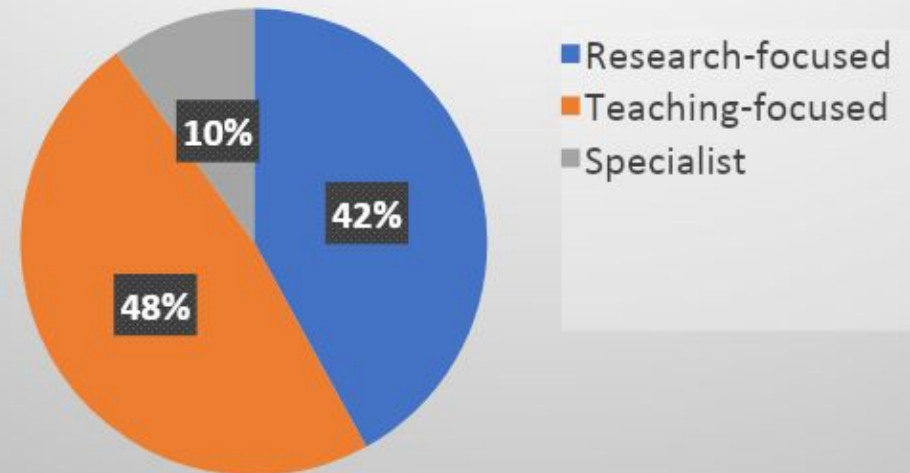


Higher Education Institutions (HEI) Profile

Coverage across UK – HEI responses



Response by HEI type



OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

- **Main Themes:**
 - Strengths and Attributes
 - Core needs
 - Systemic barriers

STRENGTHS AND ATTRIBUTES

**Independence
and
Adaptability**

“My upbringing prepared me to be on my own. I can handle changes quickly; it’s just another part of life for me.”

**Cultural
Awareness and
Social Skills**

“I’ve learned to connect easily with people from all backgrounds; it helps me integrate socially at university.”

**Disciplined and
Focused**

“Seeing my parents adapt and succeed in so many different and challenging environments, really taught me how to stay focused and disciplined in pursuing my own aspirations”

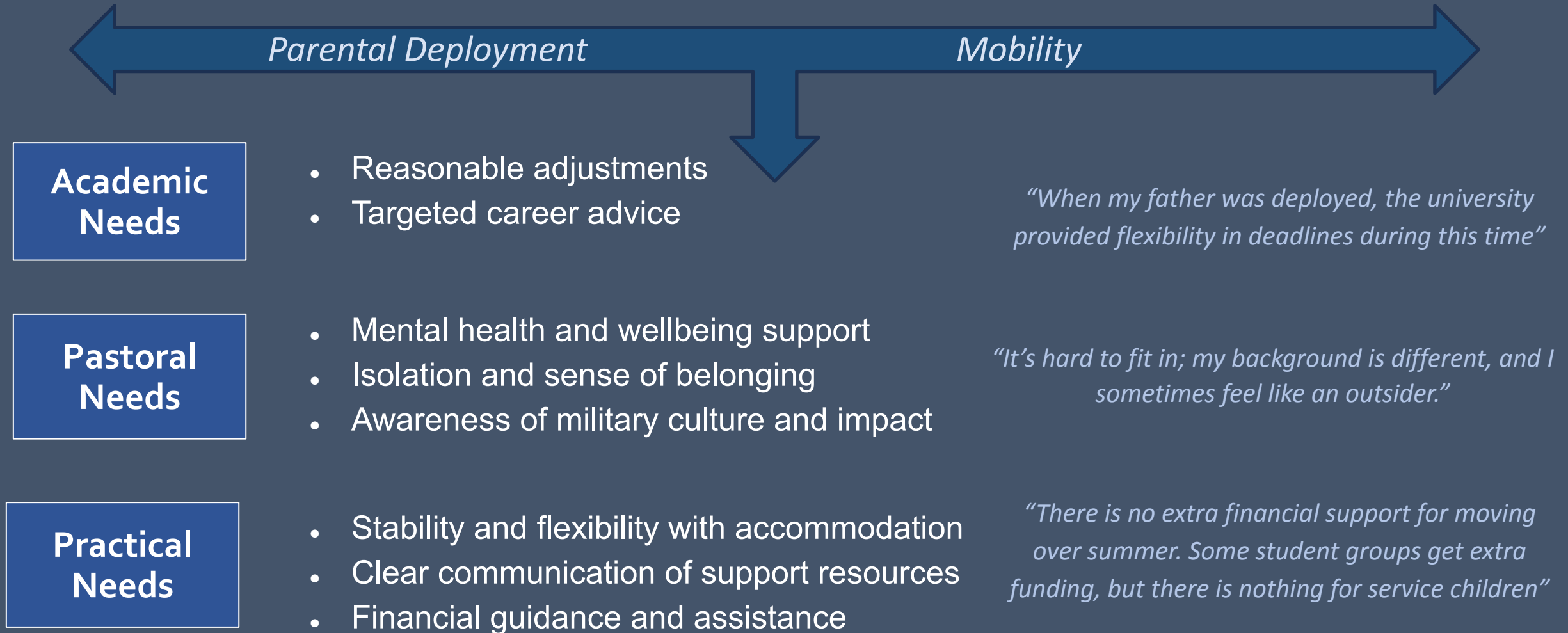
**Resilience as
Perseverance**

“I’m used to dealing with things on my own, but sometimes it feels isolating because I don’t ask for help.”

**Strengths not
recognised**

“I’m not sure we leverage these students’ strengths any more than we do for others.”

CORE NEEDS



Parental Deployment

Mobility

Academic Needs

- Reasonable adjustments
- Targeted career advice

"When my father was deployed, the university provided flexibility in deadlines during this time"

Pastoral Needs

- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Isolation and sense of belonging
- Awareness of military culture and impact

"It's hard to fit in; my background is different, and I sometimes feel like an outsider."

Practical Needs

- Stability and flexibility with accommodation
- Clear communication of support resources
- Financial guidance and assistance

"There is no extra financial support for moving over summer. Some student groups get extra funding, but there is nothing for service children"

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS

**Data and
Identification**

“The main barrier is identifying this student population and flagging them on the student record system”

**Lack of strategic
planning**

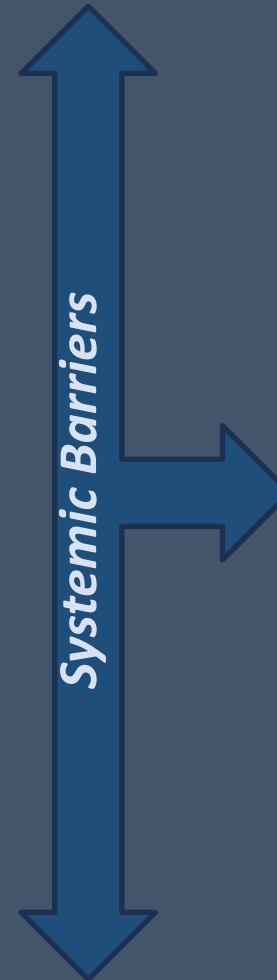
“It seems to be people with an interest of service children driving it and it needs to be driven by the university with clear plans and strategies”

**Financial structure
and resources**

“The needs to be financial support and structures in place similar to other underrepresented groups ”

**Lack of awareness
among staff**

“There is a lack of awareness among faculty and staff about the challenges specific to this demographic. We need to build the knowledge and awareness”



Core needs

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT SO FAR...

- Service children bring a diverse range of needs and experiences
- Limited and variable support provided across HEIs
- Limited awareness of service children's needs and experiences at all levels
- Strengths are not being maximised any differently than other student groups
- Lack of specific policies and practices for this student group
- Limited data on service children in Higher Education
- Isolated areas of good practice within the sector to mitigate barriers and meet student needs

Examples of good practices from HE providers

University-Wide Approach

(Establish Clear Strategies, Policies & Processes)

Identifying service children at enrolment

“We have a question in the enrolment task which identifies these students. I have a report set up from this so I can analyse the data and use it to contact the students and offer support”

Recognition in widening access and participation plans

“We now have senior management on board more recently which has led to the changes we made to our APPs”

Bespoke Armed Forces Covenant pledges

“The Covenant we originally signed just had generic promises of how we would support all armed forces students, we have updated this to provide specific promises to all the different groups, Making them more specific and meaningful to each group”

1% have bespoke pledges

Cultural awareness at all levels

“We have a staff facing website that provides information about service children, why we are supporting them and details of how staff can support this group of students”

Other examples of good practice

Armed forces network

“Our armed forces network connects staff and students with an armed forces background or who have an interest. I have found that quite helpful in connecting people like me, it’s a nice and informal community, very supportive”.

Reasonable adjustments

“Service children are provided with flexibility around assignments during and leading up to parental deployment, similar to other students with extenuating circumstances”

Single point of contact

“We have a designated Armed Forces Lead at the university if we have any specific questions or concerns. They also keep us updated via the armed forces community. They are really supportive and can relate to military life”.

Intersectionality

“The support we have already put in place for other WPs seems to be enough support for our service children, because there is a lot of intersectionality.”

Emerging Best Practice Principles?

University-Wide Approach

Sense of Belonging

Staff Awareness

Strengths and Achievements



Intersectionality

Identifying service children at enrolment

Cultural awareness at all levels

Reasonable adjustments

Armed forces network

Bespoke Armed Forces Covenant pledges

Recognition in widening access and participation plans

Single point of contact

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE?

Discussion 1:

1. **Strengths:** How can HEIs better recognise and harness the unique strengths of service children, such as adaptability and resilience?
2. **Needs:** What additional needs or challenges might service children face that the research may not fully capture? What factors could be limiting HEIs' ability to address these needs?
3. **Systemic Barriers:** What underlying issues contribute to barriers like data limitations and limited staff awareness, and what steps can we take to overcome them?

WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE?

Discussion 2:

Guiding principles

What key principles should shape how HEIs create welcoming, supportive environments for service children?

EMERGING BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

University-wide strategy

- Clear approach and policies (e.g., recognising service children in APPs)
- Cultural awareness at a strategic level
- Identifying service children at enrolment and monitoring progress

Collaborative approach to engagement

- A commitment to co-production
- Close working relationship with academic and professional service staff and students

Sense of belonging

Strengths maximised

Staff awareness

Students are heard

Effective university transition



Support critical points of engagement



CONTACT

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFO ON THE PROJECT OR ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED, PLEASE CONTACT:

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Thank you!

