

# MOVING SCHOOLS

## SERVICE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRESSION

### IN THIS BRIEFING:

We summarise the key issues associated with Service children's mobility between schools and the likely impacts on their educational progression and make some key recommendations.

Family mobility is unavoidable in the context of an effective armed forces; frequent changes of school are a fact of life for many Service children. Such frequent changes of school may help a child develop a broad range of experiences, social skills and coping mechanisms but may impact a range of factors relating to educational progression. Key issues (McCullouch and Hall, 2016) include:

- friendships
- attainment
- continuity of curriculum
- access to extra-curricular activities

In this briefing we look at these impacts and explore the steps that families, education providers, local authorities, and other agencies can take to lessen the impact of mobility on children and young people's educational progression.



Existing research shows that Service children are underrepresented in higher education.

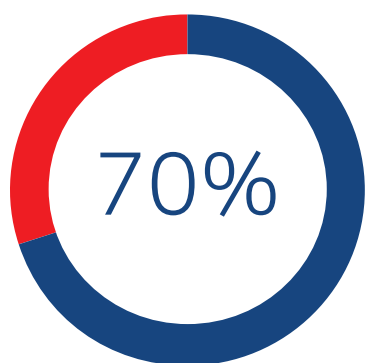
"I went to six different schools, two different colleges and so far only the one university. I'm hoping to stick to that"

Steffi, undergraduate

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Mobility is a characteristic of life in the armed forces, more so for Army personnel than for other branches (National Audit Office, 2013). The policy direction is towards more stable environments with longer-term postings (Ministry of Defence, 2015), and policy towards service personnel accommodation is changing in part to support those who seek greater stability (Ministry of Defence, 2018). Nevertheless, mobility will continue to be a part of the experience of being a service child; Ofsted (2011) notes that up to 70 per cent of primary-age children in MoD schools move during the school year.



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## KEY ISSUES

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SERVICE BRANCHES

Patterns of family mobility differ with the branch of the parent's service (National Audit Office, 2013). Army personnel and their families are more likely to be mobile than RAF personnel, and are much more likely to be mobile than Navy personnel. Additionally, Army infantry mobility tends to involve relocation of entire units while RAF and Navy personnel tend to move individually (Department for Education, 2013; Ofsted, 2011). This reflects differences in operational demands and strategic priorities between the branches of service.

Differences in patterns of mobility also speak to the diversity of experience of service children. It is thus crucial to consider the individual circumstances of children from military families and not to regard them as a homogeneous group

## MOBILITY &amp; ATTAINMENT

Mobility is popularly held to have a significant impact on student attainment. Research by the Armed Forces Covenant (2018) suggests that, for the period 2013-2017, Service children who move schools frequently are more likely to achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 than mobile non-Service non-disadvantaged children. In 2016 and 2017, Service children made less progress than non-disadvantaged non-Service children in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, though not outwith the confidence intervals. However, while the link between mobility and attainment may not be

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conclusively demonstrated, mobile learners can experience repetition in the school curriculum or can find themselves having to rapidly adjust to the demands of different exam boards as they prepare for examinations.

When students move schools, transfer of information can be patchy, with the onus resting on service families to ensure that important information is passed on (Forces in Mind Trust, 2015). Movement between schools is also a risk factor in systematically monitoring students' progression in learning (Ofsted, 2011).

Mobility may therefore act as an indicator of those students at risk of lower-than-expected attainment. Importantly, this is not an indicator of lower ability.

### MOBILITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Students who move during pivotal times for educational decision-making may find themselves at a disadvantage. For example, students whose families are mobile during Year 11 may find themselves unable to apply to their chosen further education courses or providers owing to being unable to supply a permanent home address (McCullough and Hall, 2016). Mobility may also make it difficult for students to participate in valuable extra-curricular activities, and are likely to find themselves having to "start again" in developing their friendship networks.

Service children are 4.4 percentage points less likely than non-disadvantaged non-Service

### Service children are less likely than their non-Service peers to attend schools rated by Ofsted as Outstanding

children to attend a school rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). However, this masks some notable regional differences. In the South East, Service children are 7 percentage points less likely to attend an 'outstanding' school, whereas in the East Midlands they are 10 percentage points more likely. While not all of these differences are attributable to family mobility, it is possible that mobility - particularly in-year - may limit opportunities to access the most effective state schools.

### MOBILITY AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

There is a general lack of evidence regarding the impact of mobility on pastoral wellbeing (McCullough and Hall, 2016). However, the National College for School Leadership (2011) has noted the importance of addressing the affective learning needs and emotional wellbeing of students as part of managing mobility. Mobility can mean losing valuable peer and adult relationships and being forced to re-make such relationships alongside adjusting to life in a new environment. Schools and education providers should therefore be alert to this possibility when supporting the departure and arrival of mobile students.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Family mobility is a fact of military service, and students should not be placed at a disadvantage by the fact of their family's mobility. Schools and other education providers can take a number of steps to minimise the risk that students are placed at a disadvantage by family mobility:

Post-16 education providers should coordinate their admissions processes and take account of mobility to ensure equitable access to provision;

Higher education providers should take account of the impact that mobility may have when assessing applications from service family students;

Schools should ensure that they have robust processes in place for managing transitions into and out of school, including sharing information with students' previous and next schools, and liaising with other schools to ensure continuity of support;

Education practitioners should engage with the Service Children's Progression Alliance, Service Children in State Schools and forces families' federations in order to share and develop their own practice.

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## THE SCIP ALLIANCE

The Service Children's Progression Alliance leads UK and international work to improve the educational progression of the children of armed forces personnel and veterans. We undertake research, champion better policy and support effective practice to enable thriving lives for Service children.

THE SCIP ALLIANCE IS LED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER, SUPPORTED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE.



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