Service children in education in Wales
A study of available data on numbers and provision

Contents

Background

In 2014 the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) successfully bid into the Ministry of Defence's Supporting Service children in Education Fund. The bid focused on the lack of data currently available regarding Service children and the need to establish a baseline data picture regarding the number and location of this cohort, as well as developing an all Wales resource/toolkit for education providers across Wales.

The WLGA commissioned the Data Unit to research the existing data both for Wales and England to provide some comparison. This research suggested that very limited information was available. It was known that some schools were undertaking work in this area and a survey of schools was proposed to capture information on the awareness of the issues and current practice in supporting Service children within education in Wales.

> For this project a Service child is defined as:
>
> o a child who has one or both parents currently serving in the armed forces;
> o a child whose parent/s have served in the armed forces within the last six years (Veteran); or
> o a child whose parent/s are currently serving as Reservists (the addition of children of Reservists recognises the increased use of Reservists for deployment overseas).

There is limited information on Reservists[1], therefore this report will focus on children in households with currently serving or Veteran[2] parents.

Existing data

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not routinely collect any data on the children of their Service personnel. The most useful source of information around children within Service families is from the Census. The occupations of the parents are recorded and the ages of the Service children within households are also recorded. The 2011 Census produces information for the Armed Forces population and Table AF002 includes the associated members of the household by age where the household reference person (HRP) is a member of the Armed Forces. This is likely to be an underestimate of the population of Service children as it only records where the HRP is in the Armed Forces.

---

[1] Members of the military reserve force that are otherwise civilians and may experience deployment as part of their role.

[2] People who have left the Armed Forces within the last six years.

Background

Table 1 shows the number of children (aged 0-15) in households where the HRP is a member of the Armed Forces for each local authority in Wales. Where the numbers of Service children are small these have had disclosure control applied to them at source. This suggests that there are more than 2,500 children aged 0-15 with at least one of their parents in their household in the Armed Forces. Data is not available for children of school age and no information is available to show how many of these may be in schools not maintained by the local authority.

Table 1: Number of children (aged 0-15) in households with HRP in the Armed Forces (AF002)

	All	with HRP in Armed Forces
Isle of Anglesey	11,890	185
Gwynedd	20,868	40
Conwy	19,063	96
Denbighshire	17,020	54
Flintshire	28,584	98
Wrexham	25,842	90
Powys	22,761	294
Ceredigion	11,165	-
Pembrokeshire	22,002	223
Carmarthenshire	33,026	109
Swansea	41,322	114
Neath Port Talbot	24,674	59
Bridgend	25,358	88
The Vale of Glamorgan	23,776	365
Cardiff	63,074	137
Rhondda Cynon Taf	44,325	143
Merthyr Tydfil	10,969	-
Caerphilly	34,831	101
Blaenau Gwent	12,474	-
Torfaen	17,204	-
Monmouthshire	16,213	99
Newport	29,400	72
Wales	555,841	2,486

-disclosure control applied

Source: 2011 Census (AF002)

In England information on whether a child is a Service child is routinely held by the schools and collated by the Department for Education. This is because a Service Child Pupil Premium is available to schools to support their educational needs. The 2013/14 data suggests that there are just under 58,000 Service children in England eligible for the Service Child Pupil Premium. The 2011 Census data for England suggests that around 65,000 Service children (aged 0-15) are in households with a HRP in the Armed Forces. This suggests that the estimates from the 2011 Census can be used to estimate the numbers of Service children that are present in local authorities in Wales.

Background

As expected, the number of Service children is not evenly spread across local authorities in Wales. This is as a result of the location of Armed Forces bases in Wales. **Figure 1** is a map of the known Armed Forces bases in Wales. This doesn't include all bases, but illustrates where the concentrations of Service families are likely to be and therefore considered for this research.

Figure 1: Armed Forces bases in Wales considered in this research

★ Ministry of Defence site

Contains Ordnance Survey data Crown copyright and database right 2015
Licence no: 100043376

The 2011 Census suggests that around 0.5% of the population of children are Service children, therefore it seems sensible to concentrate on the schools nearest the Armed Forces bases.

Methodology

The local authorities that were included in the research were:

- o Isle of Anglesey;
- o Monmouthshire;
- o Pembrokeshire;
- o Powys; and
- o The Vale of Glamorgan.

Schools were chosen within these local authorities that were close to Armed Forces bases. The schools were a mix of English language and Welsh language as well as primary and secondary. In total 19 schools were contacted and asked to participate in the research. Of these schools seven agreed to take part in the research. This covered four of the five identified local authorities and gave a reasonable mix between primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, no Welsh medium schools agreed to take part in this research.

It was clear from the research around existing data that there was likely to be less quantitative information and more qualitative information. Therefore, it was agreed to conduct a pseudo-qualitative survey. The survey would be conducted via a telephone interview.

Schools that had agreed to participate in the research were contacted to arrange a convenient time to conduct the interview. They were also sent some information on the topics that were to be covered in the interview. The prompt list for interview is in **Annex A**.

The interviews took place between November 2014 and April 2015.

The length of the interviews varied depending on the answers provided. Most interviews took around 45 minutes to complete. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for review.

Findings

Recording the number of Service children

When we talk about Service children, we primarily mean a child who has one or both parents currently serving in the Armed Forces (Army/Royal Air Force/Royal Navy). Most of the schools interviewed (five out of the seven) had a good idea of the number of Service children who were currently enrolled in the school. Four of the schools could give a definite number of the Service children in their school and one school knew approximately how many Service children were currently enrolled. These ranged from approximately 10% to 30% of the children in the school.

Schools in Wales are not required to keep information on the number of Service children on their roll and information about Service children was recorded in a variety of methods. In the four schools that did have an accurate number recorded this was due to them recording the information as part of the admissions process. Three of these schools stated that they currently use either SIMS or a similar management information system for schools. One school noted that they record the information via spreadsheets which are then made available to all staff.

One school gave an approximate number of Service children and that this information is obtained from an estimate based on communications between the school and the children and/or parents. This school felt that it faced some challenges in keeping the information up to date. They now intend to amend their school admission form to include a tick box for Service families and then add this information to SIMs.

Two schools, one secondary and one primary, did not know how many Service children were in the school. The (primary) school felt that this is because they were not allowed to record the information.

The other school said they had been making enquiries but had found it difficult to obtain the information. However, they felt that they would find this information useful.

> *"What I'm told is that I shouldn't be distinguishing between Service and local children".*

Mostly, schools did not have a recorded breakdown of whether the parents were currently serving Veterans or Reservists. Only one of the schools interviewed had this information and this was because they asked this question on their admission form and recorded it on SIMs. Although they noted that on occasion this question was left blank by the parents. This information in some schools may be informally communicated to the school, but was not formally recorded.

The response from schools varied on how challenging they found obtaining this information. Some felt it was *"just a tick in a box at the end of the day"* and others felt the information was difficult to obtain and keep up to date especially if it was not a question on the admissions form.

Three of the schools stated that they felt it would be useful for local authorities to record this information as a matter of course *"...because the children are now identified as vulnerable and so awareness is key"*. Another one of the schools felt that the information would be useful at school level but not at a local authority level due to the fact that not all schools have Service children enrolled.

Service children often have to transfer into a new school in the middle of term time and all the schools interviewed had Service children either being transferred into or out of the school in term

> *"I know one girl who has come in this morning in Year 2 and we're already her fifth school."*

time. In some cases schools reported a high turnover of children with two of the primary schools reporting around 20 children starting their school in the middle of term. Often it was felt that very little notice would be given for the transfer. The

schools stated that they found this very challenging as there would be little notice of the child's arrival and it would be very difficult to plan the necessary support needed. It was noted that a high turnover of Service children was problematic when trying to maintain standards, discipline as well as ensuring sufficient resources.

Potential challenges for Service children

All the schools interviewed felt that there could potentially be particular challenges related to Service children, although most felt that these would often depend on the personality and circumstances of each individual child. One school felt that for a confident child, transferring to a new school can be exciting, but for a more nervous child the thought of coming in to a school can be very daunting.

> *"Some children thrive on it, do really well moving around schools, while other children have real issues with it."*

The main challenge which all of the schools stated was the **emotional well-being** of the child. Firstly, this could be from the transient nature of their school life and establishing themselves every time they move schools. All schools found that Service children may find it hard to learn to the best of their abilities whilst settling in to a new environment and making new friends. This was particularly problematic for the child if they had several moves and the schools found these children could be insecure and find it hard to make friends. Some children had been recognised as being isolated because they were so reluctant to make friends. Also, it was found that the local children could be affected by this, as some would have numerous friends leave the school.

> *"Transiency means instability, which can necessitate a longer settling in period."*

Secondly, the emotional well-being of the child could become an issue due to the emotional issues associated with the deployment of their parent(s). If a child is worrying about their parent or family life is causing stress then this can affect learning.

> *"You've got the social and emotional difficulties that are present when either one or both of their parents are posted away, so when they are actually on active service, knowing how to cope with that and deal with that."*

It was felt by all of the schools interviewed that these emotional issues were the biggest challenge facing the students and the teachers, with some schools feeling that in some cases it could result in behavioural issues.

Another challenge felt by all the schools interviewed was the potential for **missed or repeated learning**. Poor continuity in learning could be due to their previous school and current school having different curriculums, different exam boards or just that the different areas of learning are taught at different times resulting in a child learning one module again and missing another. It was recognised by several of the schools that this was particularly an issue for Year 10 pupils and that the time it takes to fit into the Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 timetable could lead to a slower integration into the school. Some of the schools felt that this would be a challenge if the children had come from an English school. The education system differs to the Welsh education system, so transferring work from different exam boards posed a big problem. One school gave an example of how when they get Service children transferred from Scottish primary schools, those children would not have attended the Reception year, so there may be catching up to do in Year 1.

Another challenge experienced by three of the schools was the difficulty in assessing whether or not the child has any additional **Special Educational Needs (SEN).** It was expressed by these primary and secondary schools that the SEN status often lagged from the previous school and then this would add to the time needed to settle the child into the school. It was also felt that if children

are moving frequently then SEN might not be picked up and that the process of getting a child statemented would be continually broken if they were moving schools often.

Another challenge recognised by one of the schools was the **language barriers**. Many of the Service children in certain schools speak English as an additional language. One school had almost 30% of its Service children with English as an additional language.

Also there was the perceived issue of children who had just moved to Wales **learning Welsh** when they had no experience of the language at all. Some schools felt that learning Welsh was an additional burden for the child especially when the child felt it was not needed or wanted. Also that the child may experience additional stress at having to learn a language that they had no experience of and then would be ***"bottom of the set"***.

Some schools felt that Service children sometimes find it a challenge to socialise and **integrate outside of the camp setting**. This was recognised in Service children who had lived in a camp setting and were encouraged to stay within the camp setting outside of school hours, so were then not used to socialising with school friends outside of school.

Potential challenges for schools with Service children

A particular issue that the schools found was challenging for the teachers was the **amount of notice** of the child's arrival/leaving. In some cases it was reported that the notice can be as little as one day but typically a few weeks, making planning for the child extremely difficult. It was noted that class teachers found it challenging and time consuming to assess the needs and abilities of the new child and to provide them with suitable work as soon as they arrive. It would also mean extra additional resources being needed and extra paperwork. It was recognised by one of the schools that this was a similar problem with children leaving the school.

> *"The children will come in and say that today is their last day and we didn't know that, and we have to find out where they are going and get the records together. That can be an issue..."*

Another challenge for the teachers was the **communication between schools** about the child. It was felt that on occasions this communication was not good, particularly getting information about SEN status and a basic academic profile of the child. Most schools felt that the more information they could receive in advance of the child arriving around ability, what they have currently learnt and if there are any SEN, the more proactive they could be around preparing the support needed and making sure for example that they are placed in the appropriate sets/groups straight away. One school felt that this was a particular concern for the child as sometimes the information about the ability of the child would not be present when the child starts in the school. So they are put in the wrong set/group and then may have to be consequently moved into a lower set which would affect their confidence. They recognised that this isn't always possible as often the parent(s) themselves wouldn't have much notice of the transfer. Schools recognised the need to improve information sharing with one school currently piloting a 'Pupil Information profile' which will aim to ensure all the relevant information will transfer with the child when they move. Another school had implemented the process of tracking the Service children's data as a vulnerable group, providing termly reports on their performance and one school has ensured that the UPN (unique pupil number) and all the recorded information travels with the child when they transfer.

> *"The MOD tends to obviously concentrate on the soldier and not the family around the soldier."*

Findings

It was also mentioned that some Service children find learning difficult in Wales if the country they are from has a totally **different culture of learning**. It was recognised that the Foundation Phase ethos of "learning through play" is different to some other more traditional ways of learning. This was found to be a challenge for the children and the parents. With different countries having a different approach to learning and discipline one school felt that this was confusing for the children and parents.

> *"I have had over the years, a few issues where I have had to put Child Protection into place, and that is difficult, because it's a cultural difference."*

Regardless of the issue, schools found that it is difficult to make successful interventions because ***"by the time you get to know them, they've moved on again"***. Schools also felt that overall Service children were potentially vulnerable and that this should be recognised in the same way that SEN/Looked After Children/Free School Meals children are. It was also felt the MOD tends to concentrate on the welfare of the serving person, and not always the family around them.

> *"I think success in school is a lot to do with building relationships and building trust and having someone who knows you."*

None of the schools interviewed felt that there was any distinction between the Royal Air Force, Army or Royal Navy children regarding the issues experienced due to deployment.

Potential challenges for primary/secondary schools

Some schools felt that some of the issues were mostly a problem for secondary schools. Particularly where there is uncertainty over the ability of the child when they start a new school which it was felt would make it very difficult to choose which set/ group to initially place them in. This was also the case regarding entering a new curriculum in secondary schools, it was felt that transferring work from different education systems or different exam boards proved problematic. Also it was felt that the issue of a child picking up the Welsh language for the first time would be more problematic for secondary schools.

Specific challenges for individual schools

Some of the schools highlighted specific areas of concern that were not felt by all of the schools. These included a school which felt that 'Day School Allowance' meant that Service children were tending to go to English speaking independent schools resulting in less integration of Service children with local families.

> ***"It's having an effect on the school, in that we now have children coming in to the Nursery from military [families], and then they transfer to a private school once they get to Reception. It also means that there is less integration of military families with the local families, because there are more of them now choosing the private education system and you get fewer mums meeting at the gate, that sort of thing".***

It was also raised that it was a concern for Service families posted to a certain area when the only secondary school available to the Service children was a school in special measures.

Findings

Support for Service children

In most schools that were interviewed there is not a **specific role** at the school to support Service children. Additional learning support around literacy/numeracy is available where required, either in small groups or individually in all schools.

One primary school did note that they have a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) Well-Being Officer who works two afternoons a week which are specifically set aside for Service children. Another primary school had staff training which they found helpful. One Secondary school spoke of a dedicated member of staff that coordinates all the information about Service children from the feeder primary schools and some schools found having a 'Forces Family Support Officer' very useful.

"The funding has been absolutely superb the last couple of years, it really has helped us tremendously".

Some schools had received **grants** from the MOD to fund additional staff and these were used either for LSAs or teaching assistants with specific language skills to overcome language issues. One school mentioned that they had a grant funded LSA for primary schools to provide additional one on one support for basic skills and literacy. In other cases the role of the LSA Well-Being Officer was paid for from the school budget.

Some of the schools had found that having good **communications and links with the Service parents** was very useful. One school felt that having a MOD parent on the school Governors was an extremely valuable way of keeping up to date with the current needs of Service children and having those children and families represented. Another school had set up a 'Military Parent Forum' to improve the channels of communication. Drop in clinics were also used in schools for parents every week to share any concerns with the school as well as family workshops and open afternoons for parents. One school has a specific programme for Service children which allows parents to access regular bulletins from the 'Forces Family Support Officer'.

Good **communication with the Service children** themselves was also an area of support recognised. Five of the schools interviewed noted that they use a "Buddy system" or "Special friend" - a peer support system for children coming into the schools or peer tutoring where 6th formers tutor the younger pupils. Also additional mentoring sessions are provided to Service Children based on the needs identified through the NBAR (National Behaviour and Attendance Review) testing. A 'Pupil Forum Group' for Service children was also mentioned. One school stated that they formally give special inductions to new Service children when they arrive at the school to help them to integrate, as well as testing them as they arrive to identify potential gaps in learning. Schools also mentioned working with Service children that are transferring to another school by visiting the new school with them. Another example given was where the school was working with the John Egging Trust to send pupils to RAF valley to work on life skills.

Schools also talked about the need for **cohesion between the Service children and local children**. Many schools felt that they did not want to single out the Service children and therefore providing specific support just aimed at them would be difficult. Whereas some schools liaise regularly with the Welfare Officer of the local regiment. One school noted that they have useful links with the Military Preparation College in Cardiff and links with the welfare staff on the MOD camp where the Service children are based. The staff in one school work with the SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association) Officer where additional support is required by individual families. In other cases schools would attend events such as parades to support troops returning from Afghanistan, Remembrance Services and annual sports days with the army and street parties.

Specific **resources** available for Service children were mentioned by many of the schools in the interviews. In some primary schools "Deployment Sacks" are used so that Learning Support Advisors can talk about deployment with younger pupils and similarly "Bluey clubs" are used to

help the children write letters. (A "bluey" is similar to an airmail letter but they are free and posted for free and are especially made for sending to and from the Armed Forces.) A "scrapbook" programme was also an example of a resource made available to Service children. Most schools stated that they have resources to help with support, for example books about deployment. Also mentioned were computer systems for parents to use at home for additional literacy and numeracy support. One school had set up a Parent and Toddler group and invited service families but unfortunately take up was very low.

Three of the schools, although they had support in place that Service children could access, did not have any support which was specifically or exclusively for Service children.

Training around Service children

Schools were asked if their staff had received any information or training regarding the issues that Service children in education may face. Most schools were not aware of any formal training that their staff had received to help support Service children. Only one school mentioned that they provided training for staff on Service children issues. They stated that they previously had an Armed Forces Family Support Officer leading staff training about what it would be like to be part of an Armed Forces family. This training has carried on with their designated Armed Forces Learning Support Assistant who now leads staff training once a term for all staff. It was also highlighted by one of the schools that training is available in England and that they would find it useful if something similar was available more locally in Wales.

One school felt that although no formal training exists, they did have many years of experience in teaching numerous Service children.

Another school noted that although no training was available for secondary school staff, there was specific training led through the Armed Forces Family Support Officer for primary school staff about deployment.

Armed Forces Community Covenant

The Armed Forces Covenant was published by UK government in 2011 and set out an agreement between the 'Armed Forces community, the UK Government and the Nation' as to how the government, local authorities and communities can work with and support members of the Armed Forces and their families. To complement the Armed Forces Covenant at a more local level, Armed Forces Community Covenants were introduced. Schools were asked what knowledge they had of the Community Covenant and if they know who leads on the covenant in their local authority. Six schools had some awareness and understood its objective to ensure that members of the Armed Forces community are not disadvantaged in accessing public services as a result of their service. However, not all schools had a detailed knowledge or knew who the Covenant contact was in their local authority and one school had not heard of it at all.

The schools that were aware of the Covenant knew about it mostly in relation to applying the Covenant for special schools admissions rules and holiday authorisations for Service children.

Three of the schools had previously used the Community Covenant grant scheme in applications for funding.

Five schools expressed that they would appreciate further information or training on the Covenant.

Future ideas

All of the schools interviewed felt that any information sharing of best practice between schools with Service children would be beneficial. Ideas included case studies of successful interventions around integrating children into new settings and dealing with the emotional well-being of Service families and children. They also noted that they would find any links with the other schools or a

network of contacts of people with a similar role useful as some of them currently have no real contact with other schools in Wales.

Some schools felt that more links with the support people in the Armed Forces would help the schools develop effective systems for supporting Service children.

Many of the schools felt that a central coordinator within the WLGA would be a very useful role for schools with Service children.

Some of the schools felt that more information on the grants that are available and the criteria for eligibility would be the most beneficial improvement for them. Certain schools also noted that the grant funding they have received in the last couple of years had made a huge difference to the support they were able to put in place for Service children. Other schools noted that funding for additional support staff to work with Service children is really what they need.

Some schools also spoke of the need to consult with the parents of Service children to gain feedback of the support they receive at the school as well as what resources the parents would find useful. One school mentioned establishing a parent's forum to assist with this. Another school stated that they would be interested in investing in Restorative Practice Training[3] to improve relationships in the school.

All schools would be interested to hear of future developments/support available as a result of this research. Most of the schools felt that the WLGA idea of a DVD resource for staff and pupils and a Skills Swap training between schools was valuable.

---

[3] Restorative Practice Training - this training is to thoroughly understand restorative concepts and learn effective strategies for use in both schools and care settings.

Summary

One of the main findings from this research is that of the seven schools interviewed, it was apparent that the overall approach taken to Service children does differ.

Other key findings:

- Some schools don't want to **single out** the Service children and felt that the parents don't want that either, and so they have no service specific processes or support in place but would rather focus on a quick integration for the child into the school.

  > **"We want to have opportunities for soldiers and their families to integrate with the local community, rather than have separate groups."**

  > **"We're all one big family...I don't want the Service children to be singled out or to be made to feel different."**

  Whereas other schools felt strongly that these children should be treated as a **vulnerable group** and that they should be able to receive the necessary support to enable them to have the same educational opportunities that the local children have.

  > **"We sometimes need to perhaps approach our military children and their specific needs in a slightly different way."**

- There is no formal mechanism at present to log Service children through the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC). Some schools in Wales have informal methods of counting the numbers of Service children in their schools but some schools felt that a solution would be for all local authorities to include a tick box on **school admissions forms** to **record** the numbers of Service children as good practice.

- The emotional and logistical challenges for Service children moving schools were widely recognised by all the schools. Therefore supporting the child through the process is very important. All schools felt that sharing **best practice and ideas** between schools with Service children to help make the transition to a new school easier would be valuable.

- It was clear that the schools felt that **communication** between schools is key in ensuring that children will get the right level of support they need and that this communication wasn't currently always sufficient.

- All 22 local authorities in Wales have in place an **Armed Forces Community Covenant**. However, understanding of the Covenant and how it is used differs across Wales. The majority of the schools were positive towards receiving more information and training in this area.

- Many schools felt that being introduced to the **Welsh language** for a Service child starting school in Wales for the first time was a concern for the students and parents and that more assistance was needed in how to handle this.

- Schools also felt that even though efforts were being made to integrate Service families into the local communities, it was not always successful and a long process.

All the points above clearly show that there is a need for more information and support in this area.

Annex A – interview questions

Below is an outline of the questions that were used during the telephone interviews. These were used as prompts and were not necessarily asked verbatim.

Numbers

Do you know if you have any children of armed forces Service personnel (current/Veterans/Reservists) currently enrolled in school? If yes, how many?
If yes, how do you know this?

Do you record this information? If yes, how do you record it?

Does the local authority register on their admissions forms / SIMs system?

Do you think it would be beneficial to the school/local authority area as a whole if this information was gathered as a matter of course?

What are the challenges of recording this kind of information at a school level?

If yes, do you know if any of them were transferred in or out of the school during term time?

Awareness and Support

Are you aware of potential challenges Service children in Education may face?

Do you currently provide any specialised support to the Service children in your school? If yes, what?

Have your staff received any information or training regarding the issues that Service children in Education may face? If yes, what?

Have you/your staff heard of the armed forces community covenant?

Do you know who leads on the community covenant in your local authority?

Have your staff received any information or training regarding the armed forces community covenant?

Would you/your staff be interested in further training or information in this area?

Any other ideas of support that would benefit schools as a result of this project?

The Data Unit is part of the local government family in Wales. We have long-standing, trusted and direct working relationships with local government. For many years we have been supporting the drive for improvement through a range of products and services specifically designed for local government. Many of these have also been used to support improvement in other public and private sector organisations.

Our range of specialist services is designed to help you find and use information effectively.

For more information visit **www.dataunitwales.gov.uk** or call **029 2090 9500**.