



SSCE Cymru Service parent/carer survey (2020) – findings

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Executive summary

In 2020, **SSCE Cymru** conducted a parents/carers of Service children survey, giving them the opportunity to share their experiences about living in/moving to Wales, the impact their lifestyles have on their children's education and the support they have received from schools.

SSCE Cymru is pleased that the Service parents/carers who completed this survey represent a range of backgrounds and experiences from the three Services. Special thanks are given to all that took the time to share details of their experiences. The responses will help stakeholders to better understand the experiences and challenges Service families face and what support has proven to be beneficial in overcoming barriers.

The responses suggest that there is a lot of very successful support in place in schools in Wales, but there are significant variations across areas. The data also indicates that there are many other support systems that could be beneficial to Service children. Comparing the responses collected in the four key local authorities (LAs*) makes it possible to see that the schools in those areas have a greater understanding of Service children's experiences and are better prepared to support this unique group of learners.

Along with the **SSCE Cymru school survey (2019)** report and the **Listening to our Service children (2020)** report, the findings from this survey will provide evidence that may support policy and system changes in Welsh Government, within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and in schools and LAs. They will also contribute to the development of new SSCE Cymru resources.



Introduction

Why? SSCE Cymru works with education professionals and Service families across Wales to gain an understanding of the experiences of Service children in education. This survey was an important way of giving parents/carers of Service children the opportunity to share their experiences about living in and moving to Wales, the impact their lifestyles have on their children's education and the support they have received from schools. The findings will help SSCE Cymru develop a more evidence-based approach to supporting Service children in the future.

How? Members of the **SSCE Cymru Network** supported the production of the parent/carer survey by suggesting draft content during the SSCE Cymru **Stakeholder Days**, contributing content, testing the survey and promoting it with their own networks.

Who? A total of 121 parents/carers of Service children (119 English and two Welsh) completed the survey, and their responses were used in this report.

When? Survey responses were submitted from September to October 2020.

Comparisons in findings

Throughout this report, it has been noted where there are significant differences in the responses from the four key local authorities (LAs) that have well-established Armed Forces communities:

- Isle of Anglesey – RAF Valley
- Pembrokeshire – Cawdor Barracks/Brawdy (Haverfordwest)
- Powys – Headquarters 160th (Welsh) Brigade (Brecon)
- Vale of Glamorgan – RAF St Athan.

* The four key LAs are those that have well-established military communities (Isle of Anglesey, Pembrokeshire, Powys and the Vale of Glamorgan).

Respondents

Percentages below have been rounded to the closest 1.0%.

1.1.1 Connection to the Armed Forces

- 68% One parent/carer is a current Service personnel (Regular Armed Forces)
- 9% One parent/carer is a current Service personnel (Full-time/Part-time Reservist)
- 1% Both parents/carers are current Service personnel (Regular Armed Forces)
- 2% Both parents/carers are current Service personnel (Full-time/Part-time Reservist)
- 5% One or both parents/carers is/are ex-Service/Veteran(s) (left within the past two years)
- 24% One or both parents/carers is/are ex-Service/Veteran(s) (left over two years ago).

1.1.2 Service(s) connection

- 14% Royal Navy/Royal Marines
- 64% British Army
- 23% Royal Air Force.

121 responses

1.2.1 Local authority

- 1% Blaenau Gwent
- 6% Bridgend
- 7% Caerphilly
- 2% Cardiff
- 3% Carmarthenshire
- 2% Ceredigion
- 0% Conwy
- 2% Denbighshire
- 1% Flintshire
- 0% Gwynedd
- 5% Isle of Anglesey
- 1% Merthyr Tydfil
- 11% Monmouthshire
- 2% Neath Port Talbot
- 2% Newport
- 18% Pembrokeshire
- 8% Powys
- 3% Rhondda Cynon Taf
- 2% Swansea
- 1% Torfaen
- 21% Vale of Glamorgan
- 2% Wrexham.

*Including a total of 64 responses from the four key LAs**

1.2.2 Lived in Wales

- 11% Less than a year
- 17% Between 1 and 2 years
- 12% Between 3 and 4 years
- 28% Between 5 and 10 years
- 21% More than 10 years
- 11% Always.

121 responses



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1.3.1 Service children schools

Of the 121 parents/carers that completed the survey, they currently have children across all year groups (from nursery to year 13) and 11% have children who have left compulsory full-time education but were educated in Wales. Thirty-eight per cent have Service children in more than one school.

1.3.2 Type of school

- 91% Maintained (local authority)
- 4% Independent (fee-paying) school
- 5% Both.

1.3.3 School language

- 61% English-medium
- 27% English-medium with significant use of Welsh
- 10% Welsh-medium
- 2% Dual stream
- 15% Welsh with significant use of English
- 6% Unsure.

1.3.4 Number of schools attended by Service child(ren)

- 46% 1–2 schools
- 35% 3–4 schools
- 12% 5–6 schools
- 5% 7–9 schools
- 2% 10+ schools.

175 Service children

121 responses

Key observation

- 54% of Service children have attended at least three schools. This is similar to findings in the [Listening to our Service children \(2020\)](#) report, where 52% of those that participated in the discussion groups had attended at least three schools.



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Service family experiences

2.1 Armed Forces experiences

- 80% experienced serving parent/carer deployed on active duty
- 76% experienced moving home
- 74% experienced separation from serving parent/carer due to training
- 65% experienced moving schools
- 59% experienced serving parent/carer living away (married unaccompanied/weekending)
- 49% experienced moving between countries within the UK
- 26% experienced living abroad
- 26% experienced transitioning out of the Armed Forces.

When looking at just the responses from those in the four key LAs*, families were 10% more likely to have experienced moving home, moving school and moving between countries within the UK. They were 6% less likely to have experienced transitioning out of the Armed Forces.

121 responses

2.2 Experiences that had a positive impact on Service child's (children's) wellbeing and educational experience

- 60% Making friends
- 55% Job security for serving parent
- 39% Being part of the Armed Forces community
- 34% Participation in extra-curricular activities
- 31% Learning Welsh
- 28% Access to military discounts for services, food, leisure, etc.
- 26% Schools having access to additional funding to support Service children.

121 responses

2.3 May have negatively impacted Service child(ren)

- 56% Dealing with the emotional impact of separation
- 50% Settling into a new school
- 42% Moving away and missing friends and family from previous school/home
- 41% Settling into a new area and learning about new surroundings
- 40% School(s) not having a good understanding of the lifestyle of a Service family
- 40% Dealing with the emotional impact of a parent/carer returning from deployment/training
- 37% Settling into a new home
- 34% Adapting to different curriculums in different administrations/a new way of learning.

121 responses

When looking at just the responses from those in the four key LAs*, a much lower percentage (28%) of responses indicated their Service child(ren) may have been negatively impacted when dealing with the emotional impact of the Serving parent returning from deployment/training.

* The four key LAs are those that have well-established military communities (Isle of Anglesey, Pembrokeshire, Powys and the Vale of Glamorgan).

Key observations

- Families living in the four key LAs* are more likely to have had experiences relating to mobility. This is likely to be because Service personnel in those areas are generally full-time Regulars, where it is currently common practice for families to accompany the Service personnel on their postings, which are typically two years long. However, a significant number of families have also experienced the serving person living away (married unaccompanied/weekending), which is aligned with the MOD's **Future Accommodation Model**, aimed at providing greater stability for Service families.
- A lower percentage of Service children in the four key LAs* being negatively impacted by the serving parent returning from deployment/training could be due to those families being more experienced at dealing with deployment, and/or the support from the local Armed Forces unit and/or school being more effective.
- The experiences that have had a positive impact on Service children are varied and encompass positive examples of being part of an Armed Forces family and being educated in Wales.
- Experiences Service children have had that may have had a negative impact are primarily linked to their emotional needs and feelings of uncertainty. Many of these challenges could be overcome through structured and consistent support systems provided by those with a good understanding of the experiences of Service families.



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Education experiences

3.1 Challenges schools face in supporting Service children

- 81% Gaining an understanding of the Armed Forces lifestyle
- 58% Identifying Service children
- 56% Supporting Service children with their emotional and wellbeing needs
- 44% Gaining an understanding of the different education systems throughout the UK and overseas
- 44% Supporting Service children learning Welsh for the first time
- 42% Gaining information on a Service child from a previous school (including copies of their previous work/exercise books).

When looking at just the responses from those in the four key LAs*, a much lower percentage (77%) of responses identified schools facing challenges with gaining an understanding of the Armed Forces lifestyle. A higher percentage (56%) indicated that schools face challenges in understanding the different education systems throughout the UK and overseas.

121 responses

3.2.1 Support systems that have benefited Service child(ren)

- 31% School social media (e.g. Facebook/Twitter)
- 26% Identifying Service children during the admission process
- 21% Communication apps (e.g. ClassDojo/Slack)
- 21% Extra-curricular activities
- 17% Emotional/wellbeing/pastoral support (e.g. ELSA/Nurture/Thrive/Counselling)
- 14% Dedicated member of staff that supports Service children and Service families.

When looking at just the responses from those in the four key LAs*, a higher percentage identified the benefits of school social media (38%), identifying Service children (35%) and having a dedicated member of staff (22%).



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3.2.2 Support systems that would be beneficial to Service child(ren)

- 81% Term-time absence policy for Service children
- 75% Having a Service personnel on the school governing body
- 74% Information about support for Service families on the school website
- 74% Dedicated member of staff that supports Service children and Service families
- 69% Identifying staff that are members of the Armed Forces community
- 69% Armed Forces/parent forum
- 65% Drop-in sessions and support for Service families
- 64% Peer-to-peer support/mentoring
- 64% Rigorous monitoring of academic progress
- 62% Digital equipment to support communication with other schools and parent/carer during separation
- 62% Wellbeing programme (e.g. Little Troopers)
- 61% Identifying Service children during the admission process
- 61% Emotional/wellbeing/pastoral support (e.g. ELSA/Nurture/Thrive/Counselling)
- 60% Designated 'safe space' for Service children.

When looking at just the responses from those in the four key LAs*, a lower percentage indicated schools identifying Service children (52%) and having a dedicated member of staff (67%) would be beneficial. A higher percentage (69%) identified that it would be beneficial to have equipment to support communication with other schools and a parent/carer during separation.

121 responses

Key observations

- The variation in the responses from the four key LAs* regarding the use of school social media, identifying Service children and having a dedicated member of staff suggests that these activities are already more likely to be taking place in schools in those areas.
- Families living in the four key LAs* were less likely to indicate that schools find it challenging to gain an understanding of the Armed Forces lifestyle. This is likely to be because the schools in those areas have a stronger connection to the Armed Forces due to their proximity to a base/unit and a military presence in the local community.
- Challenges that schools face in supporting Service children that have been identified by parent/carers are aligned with the views of schools in Wales, as indicated in the [SSCE Cymru school survey \(2019\)](#) report.
- Support systems identified as being the most effective to Service children are varied but are primarily linked to strong communication and identification of needs.
- The top responses on what **would** be beneficial to Service children were not reflected in the responses about what **has** been beneficial. This suggests that many of these support systems are not currently in place in schools.

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Living in Wales

4.1 Families enjoy most

- 90% Physical environment (countryside, waterfalls, mountains, cities)
- 35% Meeting new people
- 26% Sport
- 22% Learning about Welsh culture
- 16% Education opportunities
- 15% Learning a new language.

116 responses

4.2.1 What has helped Service child(ren) to settle into a new community and school

- 48% Visiting the school before the move (meet teachers, classmates, understand what to expect on the first day/week)
- 40% Visit the area before the move
- 31% Welcome pack/information about the new school (e.g. photos, policies, clubs, teachers, pastoral support)
- 28% Using social media forums to communicate with other families in the area
- 22% School buddy system
- 21% Transition/induction programme in the school
- 20% Having an identified person in a school to support with transition
- 19% Details of extra-curricular activities offered at the school and in the local area
- 17% Information about Wales and Welsh culture
- 17% Information about activities, things to do and places to visit in Wales and the local area.



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4.2.2 What would have helped Service child(ren) to settle into a new community and school

- 69% Information about education in Wales and the curriculum
- 66% Having an identified person in a school to support with transition
- 64% A support group/network for Service families
- 62% Details of extra-curricular activities offered at the school and in the local area
- 61% Information about the Armed Forces in Wales
- 59% Information about activities, things to do and places to visit in Wales and the local area
- 59% Signposting and contact details for relevant organisations
- 57% Welcome pack/information about the new school (e.g. photos, policies, clubs, teachers, pastoral support)
- 54% Information on learning Welsh
- 54% Transition/induction programme in the school
- 50% Swift transfer of records between schools to ensure no gaps in additional support needs
- 50% School buddy system.

90 responses

4.3 Visited SSCE Cymru website

- 17% Yes
- 32% No
- 50% Unaware of SSCE Cymru.

111 responses

Key observations

- Responses about what has helped Service children settle into a new community and school suggest a strong theme around robust planning, communication and providing information.
- The types of things that would be beneficial follow similar themes to what has been beneficial, but the percentages of responses are much higher. This suggests the types of support that are in place are effective but should be more widely available.



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What next?

- The evidence from this report will be used to support policy and system changes in schools, LAs and Welsh Government.
- SSCE Cymru will continue to encourage schools and local authorities in Wales to identify their Service children.
- The findings from the survey will impact the content of the new SSCE Cymru Parent Toolkits, due to be launched in 2021.
- New SSCE Cymru resources/tools will be developed, considering what Service children, schools and parents/carers have indicated they would find beneficial in supporting Service children.
- SSCE Cymru will raise awareness of its mission and the support available to Service families through schools and SSCE Cymru Network members.
- SSCE Cymru will continue to conduct activities that ensure Service families' voices are heard and contribute to shaping the activities conducted by SSCE Cymru.

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