**Service Children’s Progression Alliance Scotland Hub**

**Response to independent report, ‘Living in Our Shoes’**

1. **Summary**

The SCiP Alliance Scotland hub welcomes the report and notes the references to the SCiP Alliance throughout the independent report, ‘Living in our Shoes – Understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families’. Having considered the recommendations and the government response in the context of Scotland, this document articulates how the SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub’s collaboration addresses specific recommendations and suggests opportunities for further development to support implementation of the report recommendations in Scotland.

1. **Background to the SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub**

The SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub brings together cross-sector expertise and experience across Scotland to develop collaborative activity in support of the education of children and young people from Armed Forces families. The Scotland Hub is part of the SCiP Alliance UK-wide Hub Network which is at the heart of all the SCiP Alliance does.

“By bringing together researchers, practitioners and policy makers, we enhance the knowledge, action and environment needed to help Service children thrive. Our Hubs are centres of collaboration, where professionals supporting Service children share challenges, solutions, knowledge and action”.

 [www.scipalliance.org](http://www.scipalliance.org)

The Scotland Hub membership includes representatives from:

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| --- | --- |
| Army Families Federation | RAF Families Federation  |
| Fife College  | Naval Families Federation  |
| Edinburgh Napier University  | Office for Commissioner for Fair Access / University of Strathclyde  |
| Heriot-Watt University  | University of Edinburgh  |
| Abertay University  | University of Strathclyde  |
| College Development Network  | Royal Caledonian Education Trust  |
| MOD SO2 Transition and Life Skills 51 Inf Bde  | Scottish Funding Council  |
| ADES National Transitions Officer   | Scottish Government  |
| Skills Development Scotland  | SWAP  |

1. **Response to relevant recommendations in the Living in our Shoes Report**

The SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub has considered the Living in our Shoes report and wishes to address the following recommendations. We set out how the Hub’s activities align with these and how we can contribute to further discussions regarding their implementation.

**Recommendation 22 (Chapter 4)**

*The Department for Education, the Devolved Governments and the Ministry of Defence to prioritise more detailed, robust research into Service children’s academic choices, attainment levels, educational outcomes and career progression, and explore the factors which might hinder educational outcomes.*

**Alignment with SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub Action Plan**

Working in partnerships Hub members:

* have supported PhD research: <https://www.rcet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/RCET-Executive-Summary-Dr-E-Bowes-2.pdf>
* have commissioned and produced a Literature Review identifying existing research and highlighting areas of need for further research: <https://www.strath.ac.uk/professionalservices/sees/wideningaccess/research/>
* are in the early stages of exploring the establishment of a Scotland Research Hub to collate all research relevant to Armed Forces education, wellbeing and post school destinations.

**Future Steps**

The Hub has recognised gaps of contemporary, empirical research which focuses upon the unique experiences of Service children’s educational journeys across the four nations of the UK. We therefore welcome this recommendation and encourage that funding for further research is made available and is open to bidding applications to ensure that a range of experts are able to contribute to future research.

**Recommendation 29 (Chapter 4)**

*The Department for Education and the Devolved Governments to ensure that teaching staff in all schools, including Early Years professionals, undertake training in supporting the needs of Service children.*

**Alignment with SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub Action Plan**

The Hub will host 2 webinars to launch this resource in Scotland in June 2021. This will provide invaluable support for establishments to self-evaluate how well they are supporting children and young people from Armed Forces families.

Hub members:

* have been involved in the production of the SCiP Alliance Thriving Lives toolkit.
* have produced, in partnership with Education Scotland, an 8 step Professional Learning Activity to raise awareness of the issues around Armed Forces life and the impacts on children and young people.
* provide bespoke professional staff training sessions.

**Future Steps**

The Hub recognises the essential role which teaching professionals play in supporting the needs of Service children and we welcome all efforts to ensure that they are fully equipped to provide the best possible information, advice, guidance and pastoral support. We also recognise the wide range of duties placed upon teaching professionals and that this can have implications on time and resource. We therefore recommend that any training includes highlighting key support available through external partners and networks (e.g. SCiP Alliance, RCET, colleges and universities, Skills Development Scotland) and also involves these partners so that the sector can take a holistic approach to supporting teaching staff in supporting Service children.

**Recommendation 34 (Chapter4)**

*The Department for Education to work with the Office for Students and higher education establishments to: increase guidance for students with a parent in the military on the UCAS website; place a marker on their applications and admission to higher education colleges and universities; and monitor their academic achievements and onward career choices.*

**Alignment with SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub Action Plan**

Hub members:

* have produced an information paper on applying to university.
* have provided training for careers advisors who support young people on their post school pathways including support for writing personal statements which reflect their positive experiences of living in an Armed Forces family and the skills they can offer.
* have hosted a Creative Forces event to give school pupils an on-campus taste of what a university can offer.

have produced social media films to encourage school pupils to consider applying to university. Creative Forces:

Staff video: Pupil Video:

<https://youtu.be/CiieJiF0iAY> <https://youtu.be/0Jxv2VbYbmw>

**Future Steps**

The Hub agrees that a marker should be placed on a UCAS application to enable Higher Education establishments to identify applicants from a service background. The Hub is also mindful that the mobile nature of Service children, plus the devolved nature of education across the home nations, provides unique challenges. The Hub therefore recommends that any steps in this area are not taken in isolation but instead as a four-nations approach, to ensure consistency across the educational journey of all Service children including those who may, for example, move between England and Scotland.

**Recommendation 41 (Chapter 4)**

*The Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces, together with the Devolved Governments, to ensure research is undertaken to extend understanding of the additional challenges faced by Service children who have caring responsibilities and the kinds of support they need.*

**Alignment with SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub Action Plan**

Hub members are currently working on projects investigating the issues for both care experienced students and students with additional caring responsibilities. Hub membership includes experienced Widening Access practitioners from multiple higher education institutions across Scotland who are well-versed in supporting disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

**Future Steps**

The Hub welcomes an intersectional approach which recognises the additional challenges which Service children may face due to also having characteristics of other under-represented groups on the basis of (but not limited to) caring responsibilities, ethnic background, gender, and socio-economic background. The Hub extends an open invitation to be part of these discussions going forward and is also keen to take an active role in conducting and contributing to this research should funding be made available.

**Recommendation 43 (Chapter 4)**

*All UK Governments to include the voices of Service children and young people in the development of all policies and support services that impact on them.*

**Alignment with SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub Action Plan**

Hub members:

* have conducted student surveys to capture the student voice.
* are exploring ways of empowering students to have their voices heard by policy and decision makers.

**Future Steps**

The Hub recognises the importance of including the voices of Service children throughout work in this area. In order to aid future research in this area, methods of more robust data collection at school level are required to allow us and other interested parties to identify, target and include Service children within relevant research projects as well as the development of intervention/support initiatives. Geographical dispersion of Service children means that they are often a small number within their school, which can give rise to identification challenges with regards to Data Protection and non-disclosure of numbers of particular groups fewer than 5. Methods are required to allow the Hub and other like-minded organisations to be able to promote and offer their support services, even in such cases, whilst still maintaining appropriate confidentiality of sensitive personal data.

1. **Proposal**

The SCiP Alliance Scotland Hub welcomes the publication of this report and the breadth of its scope. We appreciate the recognition in the report of four nations with differing methods, processes, challenges and opportunities in each of the Home Nations and the fact that the UK Government’s formal response to the report has been formulated in consultation with the Welsh and Scottish Governments as referenced at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-in-our-shoes-understanding-the-needs-of-uk-armed-forces-families/living-in-our-shoes-understanding-the-needs-of-uk-armed-forces-families-government-response-accessible-version>.

We acknowledge that there is currently collaboration across local authorities, with support from ADES, the National Transitions Officer, and the RCET, to learn more about the educational experiences of Service children and we are keen to support the further development of this work.

In that spirit we would welcome an opportunity to meet with the Scottish Government and discuss the Scottish perspective on the recommendations we have commented upon above. In particular, to discuss this response in more detail, to explain in more depth how our existing work can make positive contributions to enacting the recommendations and to identify opportunities for further collaboration.