



A Game of Snakes & Ladders

Armed Forces Families with Children Requiring
Additional Support with their Education

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Glossary

ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AFCFT	Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
ALN	Additional Learning Needs (Wales)
ALNCo	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (Wales)
ALP	Additional Learning Provision (Wales)
ASN	Additional Support Needs (Scotland)
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ASL	Additional Support for Learning (Scotland)
ASNTS	Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland
BMJ	British Medical Journal
CEAS	Children's Education Advisory Service (of the Ministry of Defence)
CLPL	Career Long Professional Learning
CMRE-PE	Centre for Military Research, Education and Public Engagement
CSP	Coordinated Support Plan (Scotland)
DARS	Dispute Avoidance and Resolutions Service (Northern Ireland)
DCYP	Directorate Children and Young People (of the Ministry of Defence)
DECLO	Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (Wales)
DfE	Department for Education (England)
DSA	Disabled Students Allowance
DYW	Developing the Young Workforce
EA	Education Authority
EAL	English as an Additional Language
Education Scotland	Government educational development agency in Scotland
EHCP	Education and Healthcare Plan (England)
EIS	Educational Institute of Scotland
ENQUIRE	Scotland's advice service for ASN, run by Children in Scotland
ENU	Edinburgh Napier University
ESF	Education Support Fund
Estyn	Educational inspection service in Wales
EU	European Union

FANDF	Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum
FCE	Forces Children's Education
FCS	Forces Children Scotland (formerly Royal Caledonian Education Trust)
FE	Further Education
FEI	Further Education Institution
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
GIRFEC	Getting It Right for Every Child (Scotland)
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HE	Higher Education
HM Armed Forces	His Majesty's Armed Forces
HMCTS	His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (England)
HMIE	His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (Scotland)
Holyrood	The Scottish Parliament (Holyrood is an area of Edinburgh)
IDP	Individual Development Plan (Wales)
IEP	Individualised Education Programme
IPSEA	Independent Provider of Special Education Advice
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LA	Local Authority
LGSCO	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (England)
LIOS	"Living in Our Shoes" national report (Walker et al, 2020)
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MSP	Member of the Scottish Parliament
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NETO	National Education and Transitions Officer
NHS	National Health Service
NICCY	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (England)
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PIP	Pupil Information Profile
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAF	Royal Air Force
RIAISEN	Record of Intervention, Assessment and Intervention of Special Educational Needs
RM	Royal Marines

RN	Royal Navy
SCAN	Service Children's Assessment of Need
SCE	Service Children's Education
SCiP	Service Children's Progression Alliance
SEBD	Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SEEMiS	Management information system used in all Scottish local authority schools
SEN	Special Educational Needs (Northern Ireland)
SENAC	Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (Northern Ireland)
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability (England)
SENDIASS	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Support Service
Senedd	(also Senedd Cymru) Welsh Parliament (which meets in Cardiff)
SENDIST	Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (Northern Ireland, from 2005)
SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability Order 2005 (Northern Ireland)
SENSE	Charity supporting disability in England, Northern Ireland and Wales
SENT	Special Educational Needs Tribunal (Northern Ireland, from 1998)
SG	Scottish Government
SNAP Cymru	An independent charity in Wales offering free information, advice and support
SPSO	Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman
SSCE Cymru	Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (Wales)
Statement	Statutory plan for a child (Northern Ireland)
Stormont	Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont is an area of Belfast)
TEI	Teacher Education Institution
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
USA	United States of America (an independent country south of Canada)
Westminster	UK Parliament (Westminster is an area of London)

Note

In Scotland the term “armed forces children” is used in preference to “service children” to distinguish them from those services which are civilian in character such as police, fire and rescue, ambulance services or the civil service. This term should also be interpreted to include “young people” who in terms of Scottish educational law are aged from 16 to 18 years and who have different rights to children of statutory school age.

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Executive Summary

Overview

This study represents the first comprehensive investigation into the experiences of children from armed forces families with Additional Support Needs (ASN) who are either residing in, or transferring to, Scotland. The impetus for this research stemmed from a recognition that, despite the significant number of service children with ASN in Scotland, there was a marked absence of empirical research exploring their educational experiences, the challenges encountered in seeking support, and their perspectives on the support received.

The study was funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust and was conducted over a two-year period, from April 2023 to March 2025. The primary aim of the project was to establish a clear and effective pathway that supports both serving and veteran parents, and their children with ASN, during transitions into and out of the Scottish education system. A core objective was to equip policymakers with evidence-based recommendations by identifying the key enablers and barriers affecting the child's educational experience, overall wellbeing, and family life—ultimately driving systemic change.

To achieve the aim the research was divided into five phases:

- 1) A review of the academic literature;
- 2) Review of national policies and advice services;
- 3) Gathering and analysis of data on the target population;
- 4) Interviews with education staff, armed forces children and their families;
- 5) The project in synthesis: development of a pathway.

An advisory board, composed of a diverse group of stakeholders was established to provide strategic guidance throughout the project. The research team adopted the perspective of families navigating the education and support systems for children with ASN, ensuring that the lived experiences of these families remained central.

This study offers novel insights and makes a significant contribution to a relatively underexplored area, building upon existing academic work while addressing notable gaps in the literature.

A review of the academic literature

While there exists a broad body of research on children with additional needs, and a growing focus on the education of armed forces children particularly considering the Armed Forces Covenant the intersection of these two domains remains significantly under-researched. Most existing literature originates from North America or Australia, with a limited number of UK-based studies, many of which concentrate on provision in England. As such, there is a paucity of research specifically addressing the Scottish ASN context.

The available literature highlights a range of challenges experienced by children in armed forces families, often linked to frequent relocations and the associated disruptions to family and educational life. Notably, research also underscores the development of a distinct sense of identity among these children, shaped by their parents' military service.

Existing studies consistently identify a lack of robust data on the prevalence, distribution, and specific nature of armed forces children's additional support needs. Consequently, there is a corresponding gap in understanding effective practices, professional learning, and optimal approaches to family support.

Review of national policies and advice services

Although the term "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities" (SEND) is commonly used in the UK, it does not align precisely with the terminology and frameworks used in Scotland, where "Additional Support Needs" (ASN) is the prevailing term.

Understanding the challenges faced by mobile families required an examination of the codes of practice in each of the UK's four jurisdictions. Despite some commonalities, these codes differ substantially in terminology, definitions, eligibility criteria, processes, and entitlements often creating a confusing and fragmented landscape for families who move between jurisdictions. Critically, entitlements acquired in one jurisdiction are not transferable to another, and each code reflects the unique historical and policy contexts in which it was developed. These codes which are often lengthy, complex, and highly technical can pose significant interpretive challenges for families, even those with prior experience of navigating education systems.

Armed forces children receive varying degrees of attention across these frameworks. While England, Wales, and Northern Ireland provide more detailed and targeted guidance, Scotland offers less specific consideration. This disparity may cause concern among military families relocating from other parts of the UK, especially considering the commitments outlined in the Armed Forces Covenant. Furthermore, all four codes tend to understate the educational implications of mobility for children with ASN. References to mobility are typically limited to procedural aspects of statutory planning, rather than the broader spectrum of support needs. Notably, there is no explicit recognition that each UK jurisdiction operates a fundamentally different system.

The regulated timescales for conducting assessments and developing formal support plans are generally too lengthy to meet the urgent needs of mobile armed forces families especially in cases involving formal disputes. Advice and guidance for these families are similarly inadequate. Official publications across the UK make little or no mention of the armed forces context. The advice services available are generally jurisdiction-specific, fragmented, and of varying quality. In England, SENDIAS services vary locally, and advice is often unavailable until after a family has relocated. Only Enquire, the Scottish ASN information service, explicitly acknowledges issues of mobility.

The website <https://forceschildrenseducation.org.uk> is currently the primary authoritative resource for armed forces families in Scotland. Parents seeking information on how their child's needs will be met are frequently confronted with negative portrayals of national education systems described as being in crisis—claims supported by this research. These portrayals often highlight increasing demand and constrained resources. All UK jurisdictions are undergoing reform to address systemic shortcomings. In England, for instance, parents appealing local authority decisions on SEND provision succeed in up to 98% of tribunal cases. Although the situation in Scotland is comparatively less contentious, the number of challenges to authority decisions is growing.

The term “fighting” for support frequently emerges in both the literature and in this study's findings, capturing the sense of struggle many parents experience. Overall, confidence in the adequacy of current provision remains low among families of children with additional support needs.

Data from the target population

For the first time, this research project gathered information on the armed forces children in Scotland with additional support needs, thereby addressing one of the significant issues emerging from the literature survey.

In summary, this part of the study has produced key findings:

- The overall number of ASN children in Scotland has been growing annually.
- In 2023 some 36.7% of all pupils in Scotland had additional support needs.
- Elsewhere in the UK, 18.4% of children were classified as SEND in England, 19.2% were SEN in Northern Ireland, and 13.4% were ALN in Wales.
- These groups are therefore radically different populations of need.
- The entitlement to a statutory plan in 2023 is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of children entitled to a statutory plan across the UK

	England EHCP	Northern Ireland Statement	Scotland CSP	Wales IDP
Number of children with additional needs in 2023	18.4%	19.2%	36.7%	13.4%
Entitlement to statutory plan in 2023	4.8%	7.6%	0.19%	3.9%

- The entitlement to statutory support varies considerably between the four UK jurisdictions.
- The incidence of additional support needs amongst armed forces children in 2023 at 32.1% was broadly comparable to, but slightly **lower** than the general population.

- A high level of correlation exists between the general population and the armed forces population.
- The nature of the additional support needs demonstrated by the armed forces children's population is broadly similar to the rest of the population.
- Therefore, the possession of armed forces status does not automatically mean that a child will have an additional support need. Neither is it a reliable predictor of the type of need being experienced by the child.
- There are some needs, such as interrupted learning, that have a higher incidence in the armed forces population than the general population.

Data from interviews with school staff, children and their parents

The original data for the research project was obtained in three stages. 1) First, the project used an initial survey from a limited sample of schools across Scotland. 2) The results were then shaped through two stakeholder events held in Aberdeen and Edinburgh to identify key issues, challenges and good practice. 3) An ethically-approved exercise was then undertaken using visits to 14 schools throughout Scotland where it was known there was significant experience of armed forces children. During these visits, group discussions took place with the schools' staff, children and young people, and parents. In total 140 children, students and adults participated in the study.

Findings from these engagements confirmed that many of the policy and systemic challenges identified earlier in the study were having tangible, often adverse, effects on families. In some cases, families were actively considering alternatives to state education due to the barriers they faced.

Several key issues were identified:

- The unique features of armed forces life including frequent mobility and the uncertainty associated with service were reported to exacerbate existing support needs in children.
- While schools were generally commended for their efforts, families consistently reported a lack of coherent guidance and coordinated support during transitions.
- One of the most frequently cited issues concerned the transfer of educational records during school moves. Parents and staff noted difficulties in interpreting, transmitting, and receiving accurate and timely information.
- A simple, portable "pupil passport" was proposed by several participants as a potential solution. This would need to be accompanied by clear delineation of responsibilities for information transfer.
- Effective information transfer alone, however, is insufficient without a deeper understanding of the differing educational systems across the UK. At present, very few education professionals within, or outside, the armed forces context possess such knowledge. This represents a significant knowledge gap that needs to be addressed.

The project in synthesis: development pathways

Three pathways have been developed to address the challenges found by the research. These are:

- **Pathway 1: The Strategic Pathway** – which sets out the high-level issues which require to be considered and addressed to secure a general improvement in the situation for this group of children and young people.
- **Pathway 2: The Operational Pathway** – this sets out the practical measures which are required to improve the learner journey and to ensure that necessary supports are in place in a timely manner and to improve parental confidence.
- **Pathway 3: An Individual Family Pathway** – individual families may have to take critical decisions about their children's education.

These pathways are augmented by complementary recommendations for decision makers and a map of advice and support services.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by armed forces families in navigating support systems for children with ASN are considerable. Evidence gathered from this study indicates that many families encounter significant obstacles, including inaccessible or insufficient advice and complex bureaucratic processes. Locating reliable information, understanding local entitlements, and ensuring continuity of provision during moves remain persistent concerns.

The education systems in each UK jurisdiction are highly individualised and operate according to differing legislative frameworks and definitions. To families, these differences often appear arbitrary and serve to exacerbate the challenges they face particularly during inter-jurisdictional transitions. These systemic inconsistencies reflect the priorities of devolved administrations more than the needs of children and families.

This complexity contributes to what has been described by participants as a game of “snakes and ladders.” Families may make progress in one location—securing necessary recognition and support—only to find themselves forced to restart the process upon relocation. The pathways proposed in this report, particularly those outlined in Chapter 10, provide a practical roadmap for reducing the negative impact of this cycle and improving the educational experiences of armed forces children with ASN.

Background and Context to the Study

Introduction

Across the four nations of the United Kingdom's a shared principle is that every child regardless of their personal or familial circumstances, should have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities. Within this inclusive framework, particular attention is warranted for children and young people who face specific challenges that hinder their ability to engage fully with, and benefit from, educational provision. In the Scottish context, such learners are categorised as having "Additional Support Needs" (ASN)—a legal and policy construct that encompasses a diverse range of temporary or enduring circumstances necessitating tailored educational support. As defined by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, a child or young person is deemed to have ASN when they require additional provision, for any reason, to benefit from the education generally available to their peers.

The conceptual breadth of ASN is both broad and inclusive, covering children and young people with cognitive, emotional, physical, or sensory needs; those with mental health conditions; young carers; and those affected by bereavement, bullying, trauma, or social instability. Importantly, the definition also captures children whose education is disrupted by external factors such as frequent school transitions, housing insecurity, or familial upheaval, conditions disproportionately experienced by children in armed forces families. The dynamic nature of ASN acknowledges that support needs may arise at any point in a learner's journey and may fluctuate over time, underscoring the importance of adaptive and responsive educational provision.

Against this legal and conceptual backdrop, the present study focuses on a particularly under-researched and vulnerable population: children and young people from armed forces families who also have additional support needs. These learners occupy a complex intersection between educational vulnerability and the distinct circumstances of military life. They must navigate not only the challenges associated with ASN but also the unique pressures inherent to military family life, including frequent relocations, parental deployment, and inconsistencies in access to educational and healthcare services. Despite policy commitments to equity, there remains a dearth of empirical research capturing the lived experiences of this group. This report seeks to address that gap.

The ethical and legal foundation of this study is grounded in the Armed Forces Covenant, a UK Government commitment asserting that no member of the armed forces community should face disadvantage in accessing public services, including education. The Covenant enshrines the principle that those who serve, or have served, along with their families, should be treated with fairness and respect. Within an educational context, this translates into an expectation that children from armed forces families should not encounter additional barriers to access, support, or attainment as a consequence of their service-related mobility or parental absence.

However, emerging evidence, including that presented in this study, indicates that the aspirations of the Covenant are not consistently realised in practice. In Scotland—where this research is situated – the ASN framework is notably inclusive and progressive. Nonetheless, its implementation can be uneven, particularly during transitions between the distinct education systems of the UK’s devolved administrations. Service families often relocate between England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland, each of which has its own educational legislation, terminology, assessment criteria, and entitlements. For families already navigating the complexities of ASN, such jurisdictional discrepancies can lead to delays in support, administrative confusion, and significant disruption to continuity of provision. As a result, the educational journey of these children can resemble a precarious game of “snakes and ladders,” in which progress made in one jurisdiction is frequently undermined by systemic gaps following relocation.

This research was designed to explore and understand these challenges in greater depth. Specifically, it investigates how armed forces affiliation, in combination with ASN, influences children’s educational outcomes, emotional wellbeing, and family life. The underlying rationale is the hypothesis that military family life introduces unique stressors and disruptions that can intensify existing support needs or precipitate new ones. These include interrupted learning trajectories, emotional distress linked to separation and transition, and difficulties in securing continuous and coordinated support across multiple education systems.

A thorough review of the existing literature revealed that, although research on ASN is well established and interest in the educational experiences of armed forces children is growing, the intersection of these two domains remains largely unexplored particularly within a Scottish context. To address this gap, the current study adopted a multi-phase, mixed-methods approach encompassing policy analysis, quantitative survey data, and qualitative interviews with families, educators, and key stakeholders. The research aimed not only to identify the barriers experienced by armed forces children with ASN but also to co-develop practical, evidence-informed pathways for improving support and outcomes. Central to this endeavour was the inclusion of lived experience capturing the voices of families navigating the system, children managing emotional and academic disruptions, and professionals striving to deliver effective support within a fragmented policy landscape.

A key finding of the study is that armed forces status alone does not inherently lead to additional support needs. However, it does correlate with specific challenges most notably interrupted learning and social-emotional difficulties that are disproportionately prevalent within this population. These challenges are often exacerbated by systemic factors: delays in transferring educational records, limited awareness among educators of the armed forces context, and the absence of portable, standardised mechanisms for ensuring continuity of support across regions. Many families characterised the process of securing support as adversarial and exhausting, often describing it as a “battle” for access to provisions to which they were theoretically entitled.

In response, this report proposes a series of strategic, operational, and individual-level recommendations. These are anchored in the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant and informed by a detailed understanding of the Scottish ASN framework. At their core, the recommendations seek to enhance coherence and continuity across transitions, improve the accessibility and clarity of information for families, and strengthen the capacity of educational professionals to recognise and respond to the unique needs of armed forces children.

Ultimately, this study serves as both a call to action and a roadmap for systemic improvement. It underscores the urgent need for cross-jurisdictional coordination, improved data collection, and heightened awareness among practitioners. If the Armed Forces Covenant is to move beyond symbolic aspiration, concrete steps must be taken to ensure that armed forces children with ASN are not merely present within the education system but are fully supported to thrive within it. This report lays the foundation for such progress and advocates for a more inclusive, integrated, and compassionate educational landscape for those who serve and the children they raise.

Study background and context

A foundational step in understanding the educational trajectories of children from armed forces families who require additional support is to explore the broader dynamics of military family life. A particularly salient characteristic of military service is frequent relocation, which poses significant challenges for UK armed forces families. On average, these families move approximately every 2.5 years, although some report even more frequent transitions. Such high mobility, primarily driven by operational requirements and service postings, can significantly disrupt family stability, especially in relation to housing security, educational continuity, spousal employment, and access to healthcare.

The 2020 *Living in Our Shoes* report reveals that over 50% of Army families relocated two or more times within a five-year period, compared to only 12% of civilian families. This degree of mobility often results in children attending multiple schools throughout their formative years, leading to educational fragmentation. Data from the 2019 Families Continuous Attitude Survey (FamCAS) indicate that approximately 38% of Service families believe mobility has negatively impacted their children's education. However, preliminary findings from our own study suggest a more nuanced picture: children themselves frequently express more positive views of relocation than their parents, noting increased opportunities to meet new people, explore diverse environments, and develop resilience.

Relocation also has significant implications for housing stability. A substantial proportion of military families reside in Service Family Accommodation (SFA), where occupancy regulations can lead to abrupt transitions, particularly following family breakdowns or new postings. In such cases, non-serving partners and children may be required to vacate SFA within 90 days, resulting in considerable upheaval and housing insecurity.

Frequent relocations likewise disrupt the career trajectories of non-serving spouses and partners. These individuals often face considerable barriers to stable and continuous employment. According to FamCAS (2019), only 50% of non-serving partners were engaged in paid work—a figure notably lower than the national average with 60% citing frequent moves as a primary obstacle to employment. The cumulative effect of these challenges includes social isolation, difficulty rebuilding support networks, and logistical barriers to re-establishing family routines after each move.

In response to these pressures, some families adopt “weekending” arrangements, wherein the serving parent commutes long distances to allow the family to remain in one location, thereby supporting continuity in education and employment. Although military families often express pride in their roles supporting national defence, the burden of frequent relocation remains a significant factor affecting family well-being and armed forces retention rates. The *Living in Our Shoes* report recommends a suite of supportive policies aimed at improving housing choice, enhancing educational support for children, and promoting more flexible employment pathways for military spouses and partners.

The Armed Forces landscape in Scotland

Scotland has historically occupied a critical role within the United Kingdom’s defence infrastructure. As of 1 April 2022, the total strength of the UK Armed Forces stood at 196,240 personnel, with approximately 5.2% (10,120) stationed in Scotland (MoD, 2022). In addition, Scotland hosts 5,320 Reserve personnel and 4,030 civilian Ministry of Defence employees (House of Commons Library, 2021).

Scotland’s strategic geographic position particularly its extensive northern coastlines has long underpinned its importance in military operations, training exercises, and national defence. Currently, the country continues to accommodate a substantial military presence, including key installations such as HM Naval Base Clyde (Faslane), which serves as the principal base for the UK’s nuclear submarine fleet; RAF Lossiemouth, an essential Quick Reaction Alert base for Typhoon fighter aircraft; and Leuchars Station, now home to the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards under British Army command. Other notable facilities include Fort George (Inverness) and the Redford and Dreghorn Barracks (Edinburgh), although several of these are slated for closure under the UK Government’s “Future Soldier” restructuring initiative (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

Despite this extensive infrastructure, the period between 2014 and 2023 saw a 41% decline in recruitment to the Armed Forces from Scotland (The Times, 2025). Recruitment to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force declined by 37% and 53%, respectively, over the same timeframe. These trends, combined with base closures, signal a transformation in Scotland’s military landscape. Nevertheless, many armed forces families continue to reside in key regions particularly around installations in Argyll and Bute (Faslane), Moray (RAF Lossiemouth), and Fife (Leuchars) contributing to the distinctive social and demographic fabric of these communities.

The unique lifestyle of military service exerts profound effects on the children within these families, who often endure repeated disruptions to their education, healthcare, and social networks, as well as the psychological strain associated with parental absences due to deployment or training. The *Rallying to the Flag* report (MacLeod et al., 2022) highlights significant variation in the distribution of armed forces children across Scotland's 32 local authorities. Localities such as Argyll and Bute, Moray, and Highland exhibit the highest concentrations of these children due to their proximity to major military installations. In contrast, urban centres like Glasgow and Edinburgh report lower concentrations. However, armed forces children are present in every local authority, underscoring the necessity for all educational institutions to develop inclusive practices and resources tailored to the distinct needs of this population (see map below).

Armed forces children in Scotland's schools:

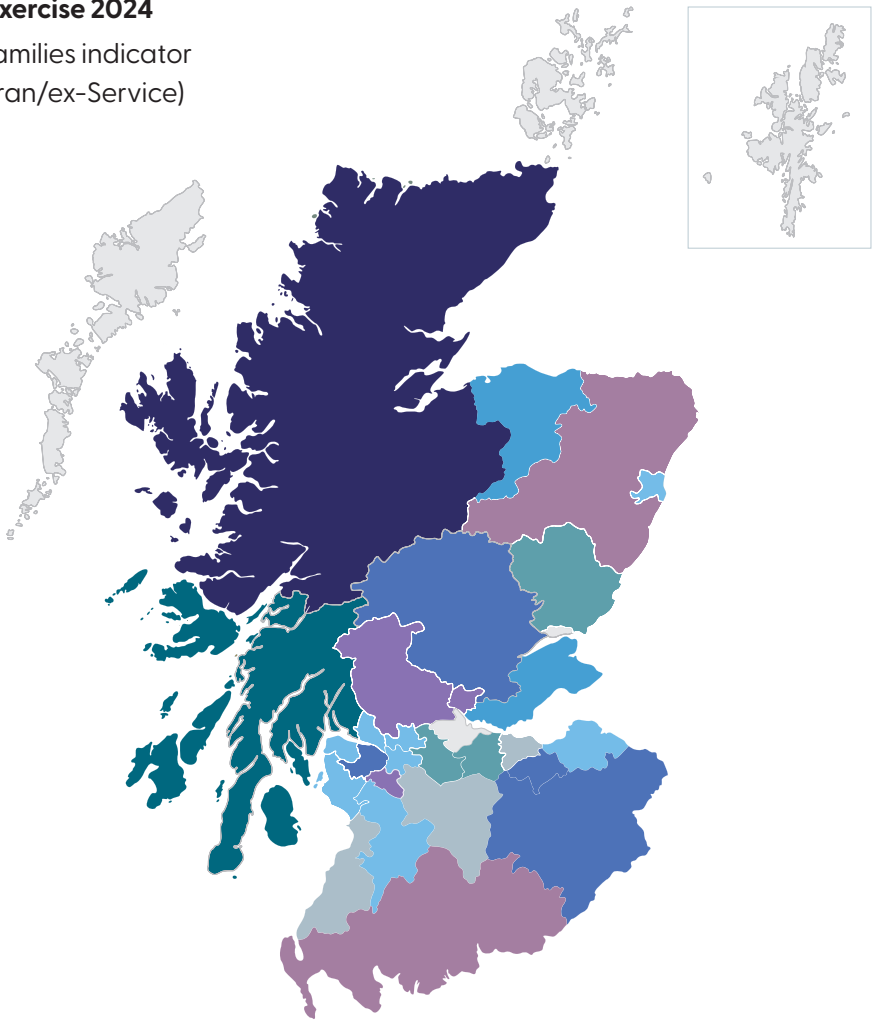
ADES data collection exercise 2024

SEEMIS armed forces families indicator
(Regular, Reserve, Veteran/ex-Service)

KEY
Children and young people identified in
Primary, Secondary
and Special Schools

Range of national data

	1000+
	900-999
	800-899
	700-799
	600-699
	500-599
	400-499
	300-399
	200-299
	100-199
	0-99



Note: Exercise – SEEMIS data figures are indicative

Research methods

Given the complexity of the subject matter, a multi-method research approach was adopted to collect rich and detailed data. The study analysed several data sources compiled throughout the project, including:

1. National education policy documents from the four UK nations: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales;
2. Survey data collected from schools in Scotland; and
3. Focus group interviews with children from armed forces families, their parents or carers, and educational staff.

During the summer term of the 2023/2024 academic year, an email-based survey was disseminated to a representative sample of 30 schools identified as having a substantial armed forces presence within their catchment areas. The objective of the survey was to collect data on the number of armed forces children with additional support needs (ASN). Although the response rate was limited, with only eight schools responding, the returned data included key geographical areas associated with the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, the British Army, and the Royal Air Force. Responses were received from both primary and secondary educational settings. A summary of the scope of the sample is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of pupil numbers in sample schools

Total children on school roll	Total children with ASN on school roll	Total armed forces children on school roll	Total armed forces children with additional support needs
3,869	1308	535	169

Stakeholder engagement and fieldwork

To ensure that the fieldwork phase was closely aligned with the needs and expectations at the point of service delivery, two major stakeholder engagement events were convened one in Aberdeen (September 2024) and another in Edinburgh (November 2024). These events provided a platform for reviewing national policy on pupil support, as well as for presenting preliminary findings from the project, including insights from the literature review, data collection efforts, and the school survey. Participants were subsequently invited to identify key issues, challenges, and priorities based on their professional and lived experiences.

Building on the feedback from these stakeholder sessions, a series of focus group discussions were conducted between January and March 2025. These were held in selected educational establishments across Scotland, chosen to ensure a representative cross-section of armed forces families' experiences. Engagement from schools was overwhelmingly positive, with only one authority declining to participate despite a high enrolment of children from armed forces backgrounds.

All focus group interviews took place in school settings, utilising dedicated rooms to ensure a comfortable and confidential environment. Wherever possible, three distinct groups were convened at each site: children and young people, parents/carers, and educational staff. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded, with researchers also taking supplementary notes to enhance the richness and reliability of the data.

Transcription was carried out using Otter.ai, an automated transcription tool, followed by manual review and correction to ensure accuracy. Subsequently, thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the key issues raised by participants, with a particular focus on the barriers encountered and the specific needs articulated by each group.

In total, 140 participants comprising both children and adults contributed to the study. Table 3 provides an overview of the number of schools involved and the participant breakdown. Ethical approval for the study was granted in advance by the Edinburgh Napier University Research Ethics Committee.

Interviews conducted:

Table 3: Locations and number of focus group participants

Local authority/school	Staff	Parents	Children and Young People
Argyll and Bute School 1	7	2	7
Argyll and Bute School 2	9	6	9
Edinburgh school 1	8	5	10
Edinburgh school 2	4	6	5
Edinburgh school 3	1	0	5
Edinburgh ELCC	0	6	0
Fife school 1	4	0	5
Fife school 2	1	0	6
Highland school 1	2	4	3
Midlothian school 1	2	4	5
Queen Victoria School (MoD)	2	4	5
Individual Parents or staff			
Moray	1	0	0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	3	0
TOTAL	42	40	60

Additional data sources and analytical approaches

In addition to the primary data collected through fieldwork, the RAF Families Federation (RAFFF) generously granted access to the official record of the UK-wide RAF SEND Community Forum, held on 18 June 2024, which involved 40 participants. This supplementary data provided further context and insight into the experiences of RAF families with children requiring additional support.

While the primary emphasis of the study was on generating data through direct interviews to identify recurring or significant themes, instances of noteworthy or effective practice were also encountered. These examples have been documented as illustrative “vignettes” and are included in the relevant sections of this report to highlight innovative or exemplary approaches.

Limitations

The response rate for the email survey distributed to schools was 26%, which falls slightly below the commonly accepted threshold for reliability (typically 30%). Nevertheless, the responses received encompassed key armed forces base areas across Scotland, including representation from all three services (Royal Navy/Royal Marines, British Army, and RAF), thus offering valuable insights despite the lower response rate.

Furthermore, the focus group interviews were designed to account for variations in parental military service. As a result, the findings offer both a broad overview of the experiences of armed forces families and more nuanced evidence reflecting service-specific contexts, with corresponding implications for the provision of support.



Chapter 1:

The Education of Armed Forces Children with Additional Support Needs: A Literature Review

The education of children from armed forces families in the United Kingdom has emerged as a growing area of concern, given the distinct challenges these students face due to the highly mobile and often unpredictable nature of military life. A 2021 editorial in the *Military Health* journal, provocatively titled “*UK Military Families with a Dependent Who Has Special Education Needs and/or Disability (SEND): A Forgotten Sub-Population?*” underscored the lack of focused research and data collection on this overlooked demographic (Taylor-Beirne & Fear, 2021).

This literature review aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of current academic and policy-related research concerning the educational experiences of armed forces children in the UK. The central objective was to explore existing studies on the additional support needs (ASN) of these children and their families, in order to identify key gaps and inform the development of the methodology for the subsequent empirical phases of this research project.

The findings of the review revealed a significant absence of scholarly work specifically addressing ASN within the Scottish context. Furthermore, there is limited literature that examines the experiences of armed forces families in relation to additional educational support across the UK more broadly.

Considering this scarcity, the review focused on broader educational issues affecting armed forces children. It synthesised the key themes explored in studies published over the past two decades, highlighted notable omissions in the existing body of literature, and proposed several priority areas for future research aimed at improving the educational support infrastructure for armed forces children.

The initial phase of the project involved two foundational steps: (1) the development of working definitions, and (2) the establishment of a contextual framework. A clear, operational definition of “armed forces child” was developed, referring to any child in an education setting whose parent or carer is currently serving, or has previously served, in the regular Armed Forces or as a reservist.

The concept of “additional support needs” (ASN) was defined in accordance with the Scottish legal framework. Under this framework, a child or young person is deemed to have ASN if, for any reason, they require additional provision to benefit fully from the education available to them. This statutory definition recognises a wide range of circumstances, temporary or enduring, that may affect a learner’s capacity to engage with and benefit from mainstream education without targeted support.

Study context

Children from armed forces families frequently face educational disruptions resulting from high mobility and parental deployment. On average, military families relocate approximately every three years, with many children attending as many as five different schools by the age of 18 (MacLeod et al., 2022). These transitions can compound existing educational challenges, particularly for those with additional support needs (ASN), underscoring the need for nuanced and targeted educational interventions.

Understanding the intersection between the distinct experiences of military life and the requirements of learners with ASN is essential to informing the development of effective support mechanisms. This necessitates a detailed examination of the relevant legal and policy frameworks that shape educational provision for armed forces children with ASN. Across the UK, this provision is governed by a patchwork of legislation, including the *Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice* in England, the *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act*, the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004*, and parallel statutory frameworks in Northern Ireland. Each of these instruments establishes the legal basis for identifying, assessing, and meeting the needs of children requiring additional educational support, albeit with notable variation in scope and implementation across jurisdictions.

Financial support for armed forces children

In Scotland, the funding mechanisms allocated to support children from armed forces families in education differ substantially from those employed in England and Wales. In England, for example, schools receive a *Service Pupil Premium* for each enrolled pupil from an armed forces background, specifically intended to address the additional educational challenges faced by these students. By contrast, the Scottish Government adopts a more universalist approach, maintaining that any barriers to learning encountered by armed forces children (AFC) should be addressed through the general local authority block grant, rather than through funding mechanisms specifically targeted to this group.

Despite evidence indicating that all 32 local authorities in Scotland have pupils from armed forces families, only a limited number submit bids for additional Education Support Fund (ESF) support (MacLeod et al., 2022). This discrepancy suggests that a significant proportion of AFC in Scotland may not be receiving adequate, targeted educational interventions aligned with their specific needs. However, further empirical investigation is necessary to ascertain the root causes of this underrepresentation and to evaluate its implications for children requiring additional support.

Within the Scottish context, the definition of **Additional Support Needs (ASN)** is broad and inclusive, encompassing a diverse range of circumstances that may impact a learner's educational experience. These include, but are not limited to, temporary learning barriers, persistent challenges arising from long-term illness or disability, and complex social or emotional needs. The primary legal framework governing ASN in Scotland is the **Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004**, which establishes the entitlement to additional support for children and young people who, for any reason, are unable to benefit fully from the education provided.

Recent data demonstrate a marked increase in the number of pupils identified as having ASN, with a particularly notable rise in cases involving complex or multiple co-occurring needs. A Scottish Government report recorded that in the 2024/2025 academic session, over 40% of pupils in Scotland required additional support, (Learning Directorate, 2024). Prior to this study, however, the scale and nature of ASN among armed forces children in Scotland remained largely undocumented.

The educational experiences of children from armed forces families in the UK have received growing scholarly attention in recent years, prompted in part by wider recognition of the distinct challenges posed by service-related mobility, deployment, and family separation. This increased focus has been further reinforced by the **Armed Forces Covenant** and associated policy developments, which aim to mitigate disadvantages experienced by service families and promote educational equity.

This literature review seeks to critically evaluate the existing body of research on the educational experiences of armed forces children in the UK, with particular emphasis on identifying knowledge gaps relevant to ASN in the Scottish context. The insights gained from this review will inform the development of thematic frameworks and methodological strategies to guide subsequent stages of inquiry.

Literature selection criteria

The literature reviewed was selected according to the following criteria:

- Inclusion of studies specifically focused on military families with school-aged children residing in the United Kingdom;
- Publication date between 2000 and 2024, reflecting the limited availability of earlier research in this area;
- Exclusion of studies focused on infants, or individuals in post-secondary (further or higher) education settings.

Table 4: Scope of publications used in the literature review

Journal articles	Practice reports	PhD Thesis	Editorials
17	5	2	1

Most existing research on the educational experiences of armed forces children originates from the United States. While selected American studies are referenced in this review to provide contextual insight, they fall outside the primary scope of the analysis, which is confined to research conducted within the United Kingdom. The final body of literature reviewed includes 16 peer-reviewed journal articles, five reports produced by charitable organisations, two unpublished doctoral theses, and one editorial.

Despite a robust and expanding body of scholarship on special educational needs (SEN) and additional support needs (ASN) within the general education sector, a conspicuous gap remains in the peer-reviewed literature concerning armed forces children. Specifically, no peer-reviewed publications were identified that explicitly examine the intersection of armed forces family life and SEN/ASN within the UK context.

This gap has previously been acknowledged within academic discourse. In a 2021 editorial published in *BMJ Military Health*, Taylor-Beirne and Fear (2021) describe military families with dependents who have SEN as a “forgotten sub-population,” drawing attention to their relative absence from mainstream educational research. The authors issue a compelling call for focused scholarly inquiry into this underrepresented group, emphasising the urgent need to better understand the educational experiences and systemic support structures available to armed forces children with SEN/ASN across the United Kingdom.

Key themes in literature on education and armed forces children

The impact of mobility on education

A defining characteristic of armed forces families is the frequency with which they are required to relocate, a factor that exerts considerable influence on the educational experiences of their children. A growing body of research has demonstrated that high mobility rates often lead to disruptions in schooling, adversely affecting both academic achievement and social development. Children from military families frequently encounter discontinuities in their education due to variations in curricula, pedagogical approaches, and educational standards across different local authorities and regions. Moreover, the emotional implications of repeated relocations such as feelings of instability, social disconnection, and anxiety can further undermine their educational engagement and overall well-being.

Mobility is therefore an intrinsic component of military life, shaping the educational trajectories of armed forces children (Demie, 2002; Dobson & Henthorne, 1999). While all children experience educational transitions, such as progression between educational stages, children from military families undergo these transitions more frequently and unpredictably due to the operational demands of service life. Ministry of Defence (2017) data indicate that approximately 23% of armed forces families relocated for service-related reasons in that year alone, underscoring the pervasiveness of mobility within this community. However, the nature and frequency of these relocations differ by service branch; for example, Royal Navy families tend to relocate less often but may experience extended periods of parental separation during the working week (ibid.). Additionally, mobility is particularly pronounced among primary-aged pupils, a trend evident in both military and civilian populations (Dobson & Pooley, 2004).

The educational challenges associated with frequent relocation are multifaceted, encompassing academic, administrative, and psychosocial dimensions. Difficulties commonly reported include delays in the transfer of academic records, challenges adapting to new curricula, and obstacles in forming new peer relationships. Furthermore, high mobility can limit children's participation in extracurricular activities, impeding their sense of belonging and continuity in learning. Clifton (2007), in a qualitative study conducted in England, observed that children often found school transitions to be distressing, citing anxieties about leaving friends and uncertainties regarding social reintegration. Likewise, Bowes (2018), in a pioneering study on armed forces children in Scotland, identified mobility and parental absence as the two most salient factors influencing the educational experiences of these children.

Parents also encounter considerable logistical barriers when attempting to secure appropriate school placements for their children. These challenges include difficulties in obtaining places in preferred schools, inconsistencies in admissions processes, and delays in transferring educational records, all of which disrupt continuity in learning (National Audit Office, 2013). Frequent relocations may also result in either repetition of previously covered material or significant learning gaps, particularly when transitions occur across differing national or international educational systems (O'Neill, 2011). Nevertheless, some families report perceived benefits of mobility, particularly in the context of international relocations, where exposure to diverse cultures, languages, and educational environments may broaden children's perspectives and foster resilience (Weber & Weber, 2005).

Empirical attempts to quantify the impact of mobility on educational outcomes among armed forces children have yielded mixed results. Hutchings et al. (2013), in a large-scale study of pupils with high levels of school mobility, concluded that school mobility – rather than residential mobility – had a more pronounced effect on educational attainment. The study found that mobile pupils were more likely to face challenges related to integration and academic performance. Interestingly, Clifton (2007) noted that armed forces children may be more inclined to seek academic support from teachers, although the reasons underpinning this behaviour remain insufficiently explored and warrant further investigation.

Conversely, there is emerging evidence that schools with high concentrations of armed forces children can develop effective strategies to mitigate the negative effects of mobility. Dobson and Henthorne (1999), through a case study of high mobility schools, observed that institutions with substantial numbers of armed forces children often demonstrated strong academic performance. Such schools were characterised by cohesive learner communities, consistent parental engagement, and robust support systems that collectively contributed to positive educational outcomes. These findings suggest that, under conducive conditions, the potentially disruptive impact of mobility can be alleviated through targeted institutional practices and supportive educational environments.

Parental deployment

The absence of a parent due to military service carries significant implications for the emotional and educational wellbeing of children. Separation arising from deployment or extended service commitments can lead to psychological distress, anxiety, and feelings of abandonment. These emotional disruptions may destabilise family routines, alter household dynamics, and impair a child's capacity to manage academic responsibilities and social interactions effectively.

Children in armed forces families must regularly contend with parental absence resulting from deployments, during which service personnel are stationed elsewhere for training or operational duties (Ministry of Defence, 2009; O'Neill, 2011). While similar absences occur in other professional sectors, such as the oil and gas industry, military deployment is marked by heightened risk, unpredictability, and emotional strain (Andres & Moelker, 2011). One of the most commonly cited challenges among children of service personnel is the inability to maintain consistent contact with a deployed parent (Jain et al., 2017).

Although the consequences of parental absence are multifaceted, its direct impact on educational outcomes remains an area requiring further empirical exploration (Opie et al., 2024). Existing literature tends to situate educational impacts within the broader context of familial stress and emotional strain induced by deployment (Moeller et al., 2015; Opie et al., 2024). The deployment cycle is typically conceptualised as comprising three distinct phases—pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment with each posing unique emotional and logistical challenges (O'Neill, 2011). However, current empirical research predominantly concentrates on the deployment phase, with relatively limited attention given to the pre and post deployment periods (Alfano et al., 2016).

While numerous quantitative studies have sought to establish correlations between deployment and children's academic or emotional outcomes, an expanding body of qualitative research has begun to illuminate the lived experiences of children navigating parental absence (Baptist et al., 2015; Huebner et al., 2007; Knobloch et al., 2015; Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). These studies consistently depict deployment as a period of emotional intensity, marked by sadness, loneliness, and uncertainty surrounding the deployed parent's safety and return. Parental absence also disrupts family cohesion, often leading to increased domestic responsibilities for children (Gribble & Fear, 2019; Knobloch et al., 2015). Moreover, even non-operational separations, though shorter, have been shown to negatively affect family functioning and the psychological wellbeing of both spouses and children (Gribble & Fear, 2019).

Notwithstanding these challenges, some children exhibit positive developmental outcomes during periods of parental deployment. In certain cases, they demonstrate enhanced maturity, resilience, and a strengthened sense of familial cohesion (Baptist et al., 2015; Knobloch et al., 2015). Mothers of armed forces children have also observed that their children often develop heightened empathy and thoughtfulness because of these experiences (Farrell-Wright, 2011).

Children adopt a range of coping strategies in response to parental absence, such as seeking support from family and peers, engaging in leisure activities, or, conversely, withdrawing from social interaction (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017). Nonetheless, concerns persist regarding the potential impact on academic performance. Some children report diminished enjoyment of school, reduced motivation, and a decline in academic achievement during periods of parental deployment (Skomorovsky & Bullock, 2017).

Crucially, one study suggests that the most significant factor influencing children's emotional and behavioural well-being may not be the absence itself, but the psychological aftermath of deployment, particularly when the returning parent experiences post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Fear et al. (2018) found that children, especially boys, whose parents exhibited PTSD symptoms, demonstrated greater difficulties in emotional regulation and social interaction. However, Bowes (2018) contends that instead of focusing solely on clinically elevated anxiety levels, it is essential to examine the underlying sources of children's anxieties and uncertainties, including their perceptions of safety, change, and familial cohesion.

Emerging research also emphasises the importance of school environments in shaping the experiences of armed forces children during parental deployment. A recent study conducted in a UK garrison town revealed that schools are not uniformly perceived as supportive spaces for children from military backgrounds, particularly in contexts where prevailing attitudes among staff or students are unsympathetic or overtly critical of the military (Yarwood et al., 2021). These findings underscore the need for greater awareness within educational settings regarding the unique challenges faced by armed forces families and the importance of fostering inclusive and empathetic school cultures.

Identity of armed forces children

The identity formation of children from armed forces families constitutes a complex and evolving process, shaped by the unique demands and disruptions inherent to military life. Parental deployment, frequent geographic relocations, and the sacrifices associated with military service all contribute to a multifaceted construction of self. These children's identities are informed not only by a sense of pride in their familial military affiliation but also by the emotional turbulence and social discontinuity they routinely experience. Key factors influencing their identity development include resilience cultivated in response to adversity, the adoption of coping strategies during parental absences, and the negotiation of diverse cultural and social contexts resulting from frequent mobility.

In a study conducted by Jain, Stevelink, and Fear (2017), adolescents aged 11–16 were invited to reflect on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of having a parent serving in the UK Armed Forces. Notably, 61% of participants identified the lack of regular contact with their military parent as the most significant negative aspect. In contrast, the most frequently cited positive dimensions were a sense of pride (25%) and financial stability (25%). These findings underscore the duality of military life: while it can foster strong feelings of familial pride and socio-economic security, it also presents profound emotional challenges that shape children's identity trajectories.

A prominent theme within the literature is the perception of “otherness”, a sense of being fundamentally different from civilian peers. This is particularly evident in the educational context, where armed forces children often report feeling misunderstood. In a qualitative study conducted in a UK garrison town, one child encapsulated this sentiment with the remark: “Civvies don’t understand us” (Yarwood et al., 2021, p. 256). This sense of alienation was echoed across age groups, particularly in the observation that teachers don’t understand the implications of parental deployment. Such perceptions highlight a substantial gap in the understanding and support provided within educational settings and point to the urgent need for culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that recognise and accommodate the lived experiences of military-connected students.

A nuanced understanding of the identity formation processes among armed forces children holds significant implications for both academic inquiry and policy development. It provides critical insights into how personal identity intersects with familial bonds and the broader socio-cultural environments in which these children mature. Addressing identity-related challenges particularly within the context of educational provision can inform the development of more inclusive and supportive school environments. In turn, such environments can play a vital role in fostering both the academic success and emotional well-being of armed forces children.

Support for children’s learning

As previously noted, issues relating to special educational needs (SEN) and additional support for learning (ASL) remain significantly underrepresented in peer-reviewed academic literature. The existing body of knowledge in this area is primarily derived from policy documents and practitioner-oriented reports, rather than rigorous empirical research. A particularly valuable contribution is the 2020 survey conducted by the Forces Additional Needs and Disability Forum (FANDF, 2020), which collected responses from 255 families with children identified as having additional support needs. The survey revealed that 37% of respondents had one child requiring such support, while a further 24% had two children with comparable needs. Among the primary concerns raised, 41% of families cited healthcare provision as a major challenge, followed closely by concerns over educational support (38%).

An earlier yet more extensive investigation was undertaken by Ofsted in 2011, focusing on the experiences of children from armed forces families across 30 schools in England. This report, which included interviews with a range of stakeholders, identified several systemic issues in the provision of support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). These included challenges in securing school placements, inefficiencies in the transfer of educational records between schools, and significant delays in both the assessment and delivery of appropriate support services. Such barriers frequently led to prolonged educational disruption, with some children reportedly missing months of formal schooling (Walker et al., 2020).

The *Living in Our Shoes* (LIOS) report further illuminated the lived experiences of military families, emphasising widespread parental concerns regarding the lack of understanding within senior military leadership about the complexities of raising a child with additional needs. This disconnect between policy level awareness and familial realities exacerbates the difficulties faced by these families and contributes to a fragmented support landscape.

Although peer reviewed academic research on the educational needs of armed forces children across the UK remains limited, the insights provided by reports from FANDF, Ofsted, and the Ministry of Defence (through the LIOS report) are critical for informing both policy and practice. The FANDF findings, specifically underscore the urgent need for comprehensive academic inquiry and policy reform to address the educational disparities encountered by armed forces children with SEN or ASL. Future research should prioritise the development of a robust evidence base through peer reviewed scholarship, aimed at informing targeted interventions and shaping inclusive, evidence led educational frameworks that better support military families.

Recommendations and future directions

Based on the literature reviewed, several key recommendations can be advanced to deepen understanding of, and improve responses to, the educational and psychosocial needs of armed forces children in Scotland.

First, sustained and strategic collaboration between the Ministry of Defence (MOD), educational institutions, local authorities, and practitioners is essential for the systematic collection of data, refinement of support mechanisms, and development of targeted interventions. Establishing robust partnerships among these stakeholders will support the creation of evidence-informed policies designed to address the complex educational and socio-emotional challenges encountered by armed forces children.

Second, future research should prioritise longitudinal investigations into the academic and socio-emotional trajectories of children from military families. By adopting a long term perspective, researchers can more effectively identify persistent gaps in provision and inform the development of tailored strategies aimed at improving educational attainment, emotional resilience, and social inclusion.

Third, raising awareness and reducing the stigma associated with the distinctive challenges faced by armed forces children must be a key objective. Educators and policymakers alike should be supported in cultivating inclusive school environments where the specific experiences of these children are acknowledged, understood, and addressed through appropriate pedagogical and pastoral practices.

A particularly pressing concern emerging from this review is the near-total absence of academic research addressing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Additional Support Needs (ASN) among armed forces children in the UK. This critical gap was previously highlighted by Taylor-Beirne and Fear (2021), who called for increased scholarly attention to this overlooked area. Despite their appeal, academic engagement with the topic remains limited, underscoring the urgent need for dedicated research initiatives to inform inclusive educational practice and policy reform.

Despite this call to action, academic engagement with this issue remains limited, underscoring the urgent need for dedicated research initiatives.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation of armed forces children in Scotland with ASN, two key areas require immediate investigation:

- 1. Estimating the prevalence and geographical distribution of pupils with ASN**
 - This includes identifying the number of armed forces children with additional support needs and categorising the types of needs they experience.
- 2. Assessing current support provisions and identifying areas for improvement**
 - Understanding how the needs of these children are currently being met within the education system and determining what additional measures are required to enhance their educational experiences and outcomes.

Addressing these gaps will provide a foundational basis for policy development and ensure that armed forces children with additional support needs receive the tailored educational assistance they require to thrive.

Identified gaps in the literature by area

Despite the growing interest in the experiences of armed forces children, substantial gaps persist in the existing body of research. While there is recognition of the importance of incorporating children's perspectives, many current studies suffer from methodological limitations and fail to provide sufficient detail regarding their research processes (Knobloch et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a notable lack of critical reflection on the methodological approaches used, which highlights the need for more comprehensive studies that account for the contextual complexities of children's experiences within armed forces families (Spyrou, 2011). This section identifies key areas where research remains underdeveloped, categorizing these gaps into three primary domains: research participants, research methods, and research topics.

1. Gaps in research participants

A. Child-centred research on school support

- There is a critical need for research focusing on how armed forces children perceive their educational experiences and the effectiveness of school-based support. Studies should explore what children themselves believe schools are doing well and what improvements could be made.
- Example of good practice: Evelyn Bowes' (2018) unpublished PhD research conducted in Scotland.

B. Impact of armed forces children's transitions on non-armed forces children's peers and school communities

- Existing literature primarily examines the impact of mobility on armed forces children, overlooking the reciprocal effects on non-armed forces children peers and schools.

- Research should investigate how classmates and teachers perceive the frequent arrival and departure of armed forces children, particularly in terms of friendship formation, classroom dynamics, and overall school cohesion.
- *Living in Our Shoes* (Walker et al., 2020) highlights the emotional toll on armed forces children who must repeatedly leave friendships, yet little attention has been given to the experiences of those left behind.

C. Public perceptions of armed forces families

- There is a lack of research on societal attitudes towards armed forces children and their families, including perceptions among peers, neighbours, and the wider community (Cozza et al., 2018).
- Reports suggest that armed forces children may experience stigma; for example, the *Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children's Fund* (RNRMCF, 2009) noted that children often feel labelled as “military brats” (p. 5).
- Further studies should examine how these perceptions shape armed forces children's experiences and identity formation.

2. Gaps in research methods

A. Limited methodological diversity

- The predominant methodologies in armed forces children research—focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews—do not fully capture the complexity of their lived experiences.
- Alternative approaches such as ethnographic research, network analysis, and critical discourse analysis could provide deeper insights into societal perceptions and representations of armed forces children.

B. Lack of research using digital and online data

- To date, no studies have explored online discussions and digital content generated by armed forces children and their families, including forum discussions, social media groups, or online support communities.
- Considering the growing significance of digital platforms in communication, research employing online ethnography or sentiment analysis could offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of armed forces children and their families in virtual spaces. Such methodologies have the potential to uncover nuanced perspectives and reveal important dynamics that are not readily captured through traditional research methods.

C. Absence of longitudinal studies

- Despite the growing interest in the experiences of armed forces children, substantial gaps persist in the existing body of research. While there is recognition of the importance of incorporating children's perspectives, many current studies suffer from methodological limitations and fail to provide sufficient detail regarding their research processes (Knobloch et al., 2015). Furthermore, there is a notable lack of critical reflection on the methodological approaches used, which highlights the need for more comprehensive studies that account for the contextual complexities of children's experiences within armed forces families (Spyrou, 2011). This section identifies key areas where research remains underdeveloped, categorizing these gaps into three primary domains: research participants, research methods, and research topics.

3. Gaps in research topics

A. Effectiveness of school-based interventions

- Despite the existence of numerous charities and support programmes for armed forces children, there is a notable absence of systematic evaluations regarding the effectiveness of school-based interventions in addressing their unique challenges (Brendel et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014; Moeller et al., 2015).
- Future research should focus on evaluating the communication, implementation, and overall efficacy of these interventions. Such studies could provide critical insights into the strengths and limitations of current support structures and inform the development of more effective strategies tailored to the specific needs of armed forces children.

B. Impact of mobility on well-being

- Existing research presents inconsistent findings regarding the effects of mobility on armed forces children educational outcomes and well-being.
- There is a need for more qualitative studies to explore the specific aspects of mobility—such as timing, frequency, and type of relocation—that are most disruptive to children's experiences. These qualitative findings should be complemented by subsequent quantitative studies aimed at identifying broader trends and generalizable patterns (Bowes, 2018, p. 29).

C. Parental absence and deployment

- Studies have explored the impact of parental deployment on the emotional well-being of armed forces children, yet much of the existing research lacks comparative perspectives.
- Future research should consider the following areas:
 - Comparative Analysis of Parental Absence: Investigate how the experiences of armed forces children differ from those of children whose parents are absent due to other professional commitments (e.g., offshore workers, long-haul truck drivers). Such comparative studies could offer valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by armed forces children in contrast to children in similar circumstances.

- **Differential Effects of Deployment Types:** Examine whether various types of deployment (e.g., combat versus non-combat, short-term versus long-term) have distinct effects on the emotional and psychological well-being of children. Understanding these nuanced differences will help tailor support mechanisms based on the nature of parental absence.

D. Impact of technology on armed forces children's well-being

- The role of technology in either mitigating or exacerbating the challenges faced by armed forces children remains largely unexplored in existing literature.
- **Key questions for future research should include:**
 - **Impact of Digital Communication on Parental Bonds:** To what extent does digital communication (e.g., video calls, messaging apps) help alleviate stress and maintain parent-child relationships during periods of parental deployment? Investigating this question will help clarify the role of digital tools in fostering emotional resilience among armed forces children.
 - **Technology and Peer Connectivity:** How does technology influence armed forces children's ability to remain connected with peers after relocating? This line of inquiry could uncover the ways in which digital platforms support or hinder social integration, which is crucial for their emotional well-being and sense of belonging.
 - Given the growing centrality of digital platforms in communication, entertainment, and education, the neglect of this dimension in current research represents a significant gap that warrants urgent attention.
- Addressing these research gaps is imperative for fostering a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of armed forces children and ensuring that educational and policy interventions are both well informed and effective. Future research should diversify its methodological approaches, explore new and pertinent research questions, and give due consideration to the evolving role of technology in the lives of armed forces children. By expanding the scope of inquiry in these areas, researchers can generate meaningful insights that contribute to the development of more effective support systems tailored to the unique needs of this often-overlooked population.

Conclusion

The education of armed forces children in the UK is a complex and dynamic area that requires continuous research and policy attention. While existing literature offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by these children and the support mechanisms available, there remains a critical need to explore the long-term academic and socio-emotional impacts of military life on armed forces children. A collaborative approach involving researchers, educators, policymakers, and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) is essential to addressing the unique needs of armed forces children, ensuring their academic success and overall well-being.

This literature review underscores the multifaceted challenges encountered by armed forces children, particularly those with additional support needs or special educational needs and disabilities. Despite the absence of peer-reviewed studies specifically focused on this group, existing policy reports and grey literature highlight significant gaps in research. These gaps underscore the urgent need for further investigation into the educational experiences of armed force children with additional support needs, as well as the effectiveness of current support structures.

The review identifies three predominant themes in the research on armed forces children's education in the UK: the impact of mobility on education, parental deployment, and identity formation. Each of these themes has profound implications for the educational experiences and well-being of armed forces children. However, existing discussions on these topics frequently overlook the additional challenges faced by armed forces children with additional support needs, further illustrating the neglect of this area in academic research.

Moreover, the limited research on additional support needs and special educational needs and disability among armed forces children reveals significant difficulties in accessing support services, managing school transitions, and addressing the academic consequences of parental deployment. The absence of systematic research in this area not only hampers the development of effective policies but also restricts schools and educators' ability to implement evidence-based interventions that adequately support armed forces children with additional support needs.

Moving forward, there is a pressing need for child-centred research, longitudinal studies, and innovative methodologies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of armed forces children's educational experiences, particularly those with additional support needs. Additionally, bridging the gap between policy, practice, and academic research is crucial for the development of targeted, evidence-based interventions. By prioritising research in this area, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can work collaboratively to ensure that armed forces children with additional support needs receive the tailored support and resources necessary to thrive in their educational journeys.



Chapter 2:

The National Codes of Practice in Overview

This section examines the formal policy statements issued within the four UK jurisdictions: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. However, in the context of educational provision for children from armed forces families, two additional areas of jurisdiction must be acknowledged. The first pertains to Ministry of Defence (MoD) schools, which are administered by Defence Children's Services and located in various international settings, including Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Germany, Gibraltar, Italy, the Netherlands, and Scotland (specifically, Queen Victoria School in Dunblane). The second concerns children who are enrolled in schools administered by the host nation to which their parents have been posted.

While these international contexts introduce further complexity, the present discussion will focus primarily on the four UK nations, as they account for the majority of armed forces children. Nonetheless, the distinctive challenges and considerations associated with overseas education for armed forces families represent a significant area of inquiry that merits separate, dedicated exploration.

Education in Scotland

The United Kingdom operates under a devolved system of governance, wherein each of the four constituent nations—England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales possesses its own legislature, along with corresponding executive and administrative frameworks. The UK Parliament, commonly referred to as “Westminster,” retains authority over “reserved matters,” including defence and foreign policy. In contrast, devolved matters such as education and health fall under the jurisdiction of national legislatures, such as the Scottish Parliament, based at Holyrood in Edinburgh.

For armed forces families, this division of responsibilities introduces an initial layer of complexity. Although matters relating to defence and the Armed Forces Covenant are determined at Westminster, education policy is governed separately by the devolved administrations, such as Holyrood in the case of Scotland.

Notably, even prior to the formal establishment of devolution in 1999, Scotland maintained a distinct education system, underpinned by its own legal and institutional traditions. While earlier legislation was enacted at Westminster, Scotland's education framework has long been separated, with roots tracing back to the 1707 Act of Union—and, arguably, even earlier. For families relocating between the UK nations, the most immediately noticeable differences are likely to arise from the distinctive features of each education system, including but not limited to:

- All state schools are managed directly by Scotland's 32 local authorities.
- All state secondary schools are comprehensive with no selective schools.
- Children in primary schools enter years identified as P1 to P7 and secondary-aged children are identified as S1 to S6
- The age of transition from primary school to secondary school, occurring at the end of P7 is one year later than the rest of the UK.
- Primary schools in Scotland do not have "reception classes", but some may have early learning and childcare provision.
- Scottish pupils sit qualifications known as "Nationals", "Highers" and "Advanced Highers" rather than GCSEs and A Levels.
- School holiday dates differ, with the summer holiday in Scotland running from late June to mid-August, rather than late July to early September.
- Some school subjects such as "modern studies" exist in Scotland but not elsewhere in the UK
- Within subjects the content may be different to elsewhere in the UK. An obvious example is the emphasis on Scotland, rather than the UK, in geography and history courses, but other subjects will also differ.

Any child or young person moving into, or away from, Scotland will therefore face a number of challenges in their learner journey. The child or young person requiring additional support will be confronted by additional layers of difference and challenge that are explored in specific detail in the following sections.

Supporting children's learning across the United Kingdom

All four UK jurisdictions have issued codes of practice on how children and young people will be supported when they are experiencing challenges in their learning that are different in nature to the generality of their peers. These codes fulfil a range of functions which can be summarised as:

- providing a detailed explanation of expectations, terms and procedures beyond what is possible either in the statutes themselves, or their associated regulations;
- offering a specification to professionals of minimal standards that simultaneously provides an explanation to young people and their parents of their entitlements; and
- establishing a shared basis upon which provision can be discussed and, as necessary, formally challenged.

It is because of these intentions that a comparison of the four codes represents an appropriate starting point in the discussion of the issues that confront armed forces families in securing the provision to which their children are entitled. The codes are lengthy and complex documents. No attempt will be made to subject them to a fully comprehensive analysis as this would go beyond the intention of this particular study. Rather, it is those aspects that are most relevant to armed forces families that will be reviewed.

Cross UK codes of practice

The documents used as the basis of discussion are:

England:	Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015.
Northern Ireland:	Code of Practice: Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs of Special Educational Needs Operative Date: 1 September 1998. Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative Date: 1 September 2005. The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice. ¹
Scotland:	Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017.
Wales:	The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021.

In all cases these codes attempt to interpret the legislation in terms that can be translated into actual practice. They are therefore couched in terms that contain more explanation and amplification than is found in the legislation. It is expected that education professionals will have due regard to their contents, and they therefore can be used as a basis for formal or legal challenge. With that in mind all of them express an intention that they will be of use to parents and young people as well as professionals.

¹ Although published following full consultation the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly has meant this has not been formally implemented other than in some specific aspects.

Given that intention, Table 5, below, illustrates the first challenge for armed forces parents moving between jurisdictions in that there is no shared terminology identifying the group of children and young people who should benefit. It should be emphasised at this point in the discussion, that this is not a matter of mere semantics (see chapter 4) as the actual groups of children subject to the terms of these codes varies between the UK jurisdictions both in terms of the size of the group and their actual needs. Therefore, while in England the applicable term is “special educational needs and disability” (SEND), in Northern Ireland (under their new code) it is “special educational needs” (SEN)², in Scotland it is “additional support needs” (ASN) and in Wales it is “additional learning needs” (ALN). For the purpose of this narrative these distinctions make it impossible to discuss the codes using one generic term, such as “special educational needs” because this would be inaccurate and would ignore important sensitivities and differences in each of the four jurisdictions.

Table 5: An Overview of the UK codes of practice

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Terminology of key focus	Special educational needs and disability	Special educational needs and disability (1998/2005) Special educational needs (draft code 202X)	Additional support for learning	Additional learning needs
Date of issue	2015	1998 2005 (supplement) 202X New draft code	2017	2021
Date of source legislation	2014	1996 2005 (supplement) 2016 (New draft code)	2004, amended 2009	2018
Length	292 pages	1998: 90 pages plus 2005: 64 pages in the supplement 202X: 381 pages plus 102 pages of annexes	184 pages	368 pages

² The Northern Ireland Department of Education section that deals with this aspect of provision is titled using the words “additional educational needs”, introducing yet another terminology.

All use a common format where chapters are divided into sub-sections with extensive use of subheadings set out in a logical sequence reflecting the processes associated with matching the educational response to the level of need. Despite this clear formatting and the shared commitment to provide a document that will be of use to parents and young people, none of the codes is particularly easy to read, even for professionals working in the field. This trait is most readily acknowledged by the Scottish code, which at a number of points re-iterates that certain matters of interpretation might only be resolved in the courts rather than in its own pages. As Table 5 shows, all of the codes are lengthy, being up to 368 pages. Further complications are introduced by the Northern Ireland code being presented in two distinct, but interdependent, parts with a published, but not adopted new draft code, while the Welsh document takes account of cross-border cases with England and the need to take account of Welsh language requirements.

Applying the readability software available in a standard word processing package, to the codes following scores shown in Table 6 are obtained.

Table 6: Readability of the UK codes of practice

	England	Northern Ireland			Scotland	Wales
		1998	2005	2003		
Words per sentence	37.5	35	35.7	36	31.1	25.3
Characters per word	5.1	5.2	5.1	5	5.2	4.7
Flesch Reading Ease	20.0	33.5	31.6	29.2	26	42.9
Interpretation of Reading Ease based on Flesch Reading Ease Chart	Very Difficult	Difficult	Difficult	Very Difficult	Very Difficult	Difficult
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	19.7	14.8	15.3	16.4	17.1	12.6
Passive sentences	32.70%	35.50%	33.40%	28.80%	28.40%	17.60%

The measures shown in Table 6 are widely used commercially and internationally as a basis of establishing readability of documents. The interpretation of the reading ease scores is based on the chart, Table 7, on the following page, which is provided in association with widely available descriptions of the Flesch system. Those scores graded “very difficult” are assessed as being at a readability level suitable for a graduate of an American University, “difficult” is at college level. It will be seen that all the UK Codes fall into the “difficult” or “very difficult” categories.

Table 7: Flesch reading ease chart

Flesch reading score	Reading difficulty
90-100	Very easy
80-90	Easy
70-80	Fairly easy
60-70	Plain English
50-60	Fairly difficult
30-50	Difficult
0-30	Very difficult

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level puts the Flesch Reading Ease Score into context. It assigns each score bracket with a corresponding grade. The scale typically ranges from 0-12 to represent each of the US school grade levels. Contrary to the reading ease score, the lower the Flesch-Kincaid grade level, the higher the readability. For ease of interpretation the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score represents the years of education needed to understand what is written. For example, copy with a score of 12 would require 12 years of schooling to understand. Using this second measure it will be seen that all of the UK codes require a high level of education, ranging from 12.6 to 19.7 years. This is only part of the story, however.

These scores are based on a numerical analysis of word length. While they are an objective measure of readability, this is separate from how easy these documents are to understand. The fact that all rely on interpretation of legislation with extensive cross-referencing and integration of concepts which in themselves are challenging to understand substantially, and additionally, detracts from their general accessibility to a lay population. In the context of the armed forces, the levels of education required to interpret entitlement, suggests that officers will have a substantial advantage relative to other ranks where university or college levels of education are less prevalent.

A particular dimension of this feature of the codes is the degree to which they clearly convey, in compliance terms what must be done in making provision as distinct from what might be done. Clarity on the provision to which their child is entitled will be reassuring to families when they read these documents. It is possible to compare the codes on this basis using a calculation:

$$\text{Compliance Vocabulary Index} = \frac{(\text{Number of times "must" is used} / \text{total number of words}) \times 100}{(\text{Number of times "may" is used} / \text{total number of words})}$$

Using this index, the score for the various codes is shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Level of compliance vocabulary used in the UK codes of practice

Jurisdiction	England	NI 1998 and 2005 codes	NI draft code (202X)	Scotland	Wales
Compliance Vocabulary Index	230.2	50.46	12.96	55.6	448.9

Based on this measure of compliance vocabulary, it will be seen from Table 8 that the impression of entitlement varies considerable across the UK with Wales and to a lesser degree England, giving greatest clarity, while Scotland and Northern Ireland are less definite to the reader. Notably the Welsh code, in addition to explaining the difference between the terms “must,” “may” and “should” emboldens them, underlines them throughout the text: **“must”** is shown in red, **“should”** is shown in blue and **“may”** is shown in green.³ The English code emboldens the word **“must”** throughout the text, while the Scottish code confines itself to an explanation of the term “must” and “power” in its introductory pages⁴ with no in-text emphasis. The Scottish code goes further in raising doubts in interpretation:

“There are some issues which the code cannot resolve and which must await the authoritative interpretation of the courts. The code is not intended to be a substitute for taking appropriate advice on the legal implications of particular situations.”⁵

The draft Northern Ireland code, like Wales and England states:

“In order to gain full understanding of the legislation as set out above, the term “shall” or “must” is used to indicate that something must be/is required to be done. The term “may” mean something is allowed but does not have to be done.”⁶

However, a similar point to the Scottish code is made in the 2005 supplement:

“However, the case studies are illustrative, not comprehensive, and they do not constitute an authoritative interpretation of the legislation.”⁷

³ Page 3, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

⁴ Page 13, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁵ Pages 6–7, *ibid*

⁶ Section 2.5, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁷ Page 3, Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative 2005

A point that appears to be reinforced by the statement in the Northern Ireland draft code

“The arrangements contained in the code are to be given great weight and departed from only for the strongest of reasons. Schools, the EA and health and social care authorities will be expected to explain any departure from the code, for example, in the event of an appeal being taken to the SENDIST, where this is relevant to the case it is considering.”⁸

Thus, even if a family is familiar with the issues surrounding their child’s education, gained in one jurisdiction, they will be faced with a significant challenge when they move due to having to learn a new set of terminology gleaned from long, complex and technical documents. Even this may be difficult for a family to understand since the codes appear to be dealing with similar issues which in reality are more complex and nuanced than first appears. The analysis of the language used in these documents, however, illustrates the considerable challenges that may face lay people in their interpretation. As importantly, that language conveys an impression of different levels of absolute entitlement between jurisdictions and whether those rights will be interpreted in prescriptive or more open-ended terms. These challenges will exist irrespective of the direction of move and will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

In mitigation all four jurisdictions produce specific documents that are designed to be guides for parents. These documents are briefer and use slightly simpler vocabulary. They are discussed in more detail in the chapter on “Advice Services”. It is sufficient here to note that while these guides are easier to read, they are still graded as being “difficult” or “fairly difficult”. Further, and importantly, the parental guides both draw on the national codes and refer the reader back to the statutory guidance that they represent for a fuller, or more complete, explanation. A parent requiring a better understanding of the issues would therefore have to read the codes or seek expert advice. It is also the case that the parental guides do not deal specifically with the situation of armed forces families, or more generally with mobile families moving between jurisdictions.

Implication

All families will require support and advice in interpreting the entitlements and procedures set out in the codes of practice, even if they are familiar with the code that applied in the jurisdiction from which they have moved. If they are knowledgeable about their entitlements under one code this may actually impair their ability to readily understand a new code and its implications for their child.

Any claim that these codes can be readily understood by young people is unsafe.

⁸ Section 1.11 The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

Comments specific to the English code of practice

The English code of practice was issued in 2015 and incorporates legislation from 2014. It explicitly deals with both special educational needs and disability thereby creating the broad category under which the target group of children and young people are described as “SEND”. “Disability” when used in the context of “SEND” derives from the Equality Act, 2010. The code does, however, point out that not all children with a disability will necessarily have special educational needs.⁹ The document is organised into 12 substantive parts plus annexes. These are:

- introduction;
- principles;
- impartial Information, advice and support;
- working together across education, health and care for joint outcomes;
- the local offer;
- early years providers;
- schools;
- further education;
- preparing for adult life from the earliest years;
- education and health care needs assessments and plans;
- children and young people in specific circumstances; and
- resolving disagreements

These parts could be viewed as providing background and organisational information (5 parts); an age-related statement of expectations (4 parts) and 3 concluding parts dealing with specific aspects of provision. The one distinctive feature of the English code, when analysed at this level, is the introduction of the concept of the “local offer” for which there is no direct equivalent in the other national codes in use of terminology, although the draft code for Northern Ireland requires a “Plan of Arrangements for Special Educational Provision” which has many similarities. The local offer, which is defined as being:

“Local authorities must publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. In setting out what they ‘expect to be available’, local authorities should include provision which they believe will actually be available.”¹⁰

⁹ Page 16, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

¹⁰ Page 59, ibid

As the code emphasises, the local offer must be more than a simple directory of services as children with special educational needs and disabilities and their parents must be engaged in both its preparation and review arrangements including involvement in how it should be published. A wide range of stakeholders are also identified as being important in the production and review of the local offer, notably schools, their governing bodies and health services. Comments on the local offer, together with the authority's response must also be published. Beyond this the code provides an extremely comprehensive and detailed list of the provision of services which must, or should be published in the local offer together with how these services can be accessed.

Given the level of detail that is provided in the specification of the local offer, the SEND code in England is more open-ended on the implications for children moving between jurisdictions as illustrated by these two references:

“Where a child or young person with an EHC plan moves to Northern Ireland, Wales or Scotland, the old authority should send a copy of the child or young person’s EHC plan to the new authority or board, although there will be no obligation on the new authority or board to continue to maintain it.”¹¹

“When considering provision for Service children with SEN or disabilities, use all relevant evidence, including statements made for Service children in Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Co-ordinated Support Plans made for them in Scotland and the Service Children’s Assessment of Need (SCAN) completed for them by SCE.”¹²

While the specific reference to service children is welcome in the context of this discussion, and which will be further discussed in chapter 4, these statements on the implications of movement between jurisdictions are light. They show little attempt, beyond the cosmetic, to recognise the implications of movement between jurisdictions based on an understanding of support provision elsewhere in the UK.

Implications

Parents moving to other parts of the UK from England might reasonably have expectations of seeing, and benefiting from a local offer, including their own involvement in its production, and will be disappointed.

The English SEND code does recognise that children move between UK jurisdictions and specifically mentions armed forces children. That consideration is however light in terms of interpreting what differences between jurisdictions might mean for children and young people.

¹¹ Page 193, *ibid*

¹² Page 221, *ibid*

Comments specific to the Northern Ireland code of practice

At the time of writing this report the Northern Ireland code, which was in force had been issued in 1998, based on legislation from 1996 with a code supplement issued in 2005. The supplement was produced as a consequence of changes to the existing legislation consequent from the Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. The two documents require to be read together, introducing a feature and complication that is not present in other jurisdictions. This position is further complicated by the production of a new draft code known as “The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X” (as at July 2023). This is a much more extensive document than its predecessors. However, although there has been full consultation on its contents, and it exists in draft form with availability through web pages, it has not been formally approved for use owing to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Stormont Government). Further, currently it appears that at least two aspects of this new code have entered practice – the move from a five stage to three stage process, and the use of the new personal learning plans.¹³

Assuming it is introduced at some point in the near future the new draft code considers the issues under the following section headings:

- section 1: introduction: principles and procedures;
- section 2: the law, roles, rights and responsibilities;
- section 3: identification, assessment and provision by schools;
- section 4: statutory assessment;
- section 5: making and maintaining a statement;
- section 6: children under compulsory school age – services, assessments and statements;
- section 7: annual review of a statement;
- section 8: transition planning for a child with a statement;
- section 9: co-operation between education and health;
- section 10: children in specific circumstances;
- section 11: advice and information;
- section 12: disagreements, appeals, mediation and tribunals;
- section 13: children over compulsory school age; and
- section 14: inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and/or a disability.

¹³ The information in this section is based on a telephone conversations with a specialist officers in the Northern Ireland Education Authority and the Northern Ireland Department of Education on 14 and 17 July 2023.

When the 1998/2005 codes came into being, Northern Ireland's provision was organised through a number of education and library boards. The new draft code takes account of the reorganisation of the service. There is now a single education authority covering the whole province. The draft code sets out the responsibilities of that authority for special educational needs policy and provision and seeks to refine and develop the provision set out in the 1998 and 2005 codes which it augments rather than replaces. This unitary nature of national provision is unique to Northern Ireland in the UK context as it removes internal differences of interpretation and application of policy and procedure at that administrative level. At the core of provision, and as reflected in the section headings reproduced above, are the procedures associated with production of a "statement" for individual children.

Implication

For a family moving to Northern Ireland, the present position must be confusing. There are three codes to refer to which guide provision. Such families would be well advised to clarify which parts of which code are being used to determine provision for their child.

Comments specific to the Scottish code of practice

The Scottish code is in its third edition, being issued in 2017 but deriving from legislation coming into force in 2004 but amended in 2009. With this legislation Scotland abandoned the term "special educational needs" in favour of "additional support needs" and its allied term "additional support for learning". This is the terminology used in the code.

There are ten sections of the Scottish code plus annexes which cover:

- introduction;
- summary of the additional support for learning act;
- additional support needs;
- meeting additional support needs;
- school attendance, rights, responsibilities and placing requests;
- co-ordinated support plan;
- transitions;
- working with children and families;
- resolving disagreements; and
- general provisions.

It will be seen that the structure of the Scottish document is attempting to deal with its subject holistically and as a topic in its own right rather than trying to segment provision according to the learner's journey which is the approach in the English code. Reflecting that approach, in Chapter 4, "Meeting Additional Support Needs", the Scottish code gives an explanation of Curriculum for Excellence, which is the national curricular framework and the approach known as Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and incorporates the practice model with the elements "Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included" (SHANARRI) and is the basis for multi-agency co-operation. The Scottish system would therefore claim to be looking at the whole child and responding to this precept on a multi-agency basis. This is a much broader basis than the traditional "educational" foci of attainment or achievement when considering support to children. It is arguably for that reason that the formal statutory plan is styled a "co-ordinated support plan" rather than equivalents in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which emphasise "learning" or "education" in their titles. As will be seen in the discussions of actual practice (see chapters 6 and 7) which clarify that the additional support needs and co-ordinated support plan populations in Scotland are very different to those identified in England and elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish code, in a way not found in those of other jurisdictions, does make allowance for children to be placed in schools elsewhere in the UK by virtue of a placing request and uniquely makes explicit provision for placements abroad. There is guidance on movement between jurisdictions in the case of a child with a co-ordinated support plan:

"When a child or young person who has had a co-ordinated support plan in Scotland subsequently moves to England, Wales or Northern Ireland, the education authority which prepared the plan, can disclose the plan, or extracts from it, to the relevant authority for that area, where the original authority considers it necessary to do so, in the interests of the child or young person, to whom the plan relates."¹⁴

However, no guidance is offered for the case of children who are coming into Scotland, nor for those who are leaving Scotland having additional support needs but who did not require a CSP.

Implications

The whole approach to meeting children's needs in Scotland differs from the rest of the UK both in spirit and procedure. These differences are fundamental not cosmetic. A parent or young person moving between jurisdictions, in either direction, will need to understand the system as a whole, not merely the procedures or differences in terminology. The described arrangements for what happens when a child requiring additional support moves across the Scottish border, in either direction merit specific consideration which presently does not exist.

¹⁴ Page 88, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Comments specific to the Welsh code of practice

At 368 pages the Welsh document is one of the longest of the codes. It was issued in 2021 based drawing on the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. As such it is a product of the most recent legislation in the UK. It is structured under 33 chapters plus 3 annexes. It is therefore over twice the number of “chapters”, or sections of the other codes. The tone is extremely prescriptive with detailed descriptions of both what must be provided, but how it is to be provided. There are, for example, specific chapters on the role of the school-based additional learning needs co-ordinator (“ALNCo”), the health board based designated education clinical lead officer (“DECLO”), the local authority early years additional learning needs lead officer’ (“the Early Years ALNLO”), all of whom must be designated. It is therefore very different in structure and tone to the other UK codes.

The Welsh code is also unique in providing a great amount of detail on the responsibilities and duties of further education institutions for the group of young people in scope of the code. A complete chapter is devoted to this subject – “Duties on FEIs and local authorities in relation to young people at an FEI – Chapter 16). Similarly, at particular points the code there is consideration of the implications of cases where children or young people have a connection with England. The complexity of wording that this introduces is illustrated by these two exemplar paragraphs:

1.21 In the case of a child or young person who is in the area of a local authority in England, references in the code to a responsible local authority in relation to a local authority reconsidering a maintained school’s decision on ALN or reconsidering an IDP maintained by a maintained school, are to the local authority that maintains the school at which the child or young person is registered as a pupil.

1.22. In the case of a child or young person in the area of a local authority in England, for the purposes of references in the code to a responsible local authority’s arrangements (under section 9 of the Act) for providing people with information and advice about ALN and the ALN system, the responsible local authority is the local authority (that is, the one in Wales).”¹⁵

These paragraphs illustrate that the introduction of issues relating to another jurisdiction lends a level of impenetrability to the code, the full implications of which will be most readily apparent to those regularly involved in its administration. With that important caveat, the Welsh code does have the positive distinction of actively considering in some detail cross-jurisdiction issues and, therefore, to that degree is outward looking. Armed forces parents and young people moving to Wales, at least from England, might therefore reasonably anticipate a familiarity with the issues involved in such a move.

¹⁵ Pages 4–5. The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021



Chapter 3:

Areas of Similarity Between the UK Codes of Practice

“Wallis used ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ more or less interchangeably. He often said England when he meant Britain and when he did speak of Britain it was an extension of England.”¹⁶

Legal status given to supporting children and young people

All UK jurisdictions acknowledge that there are some children and young people who will require some element of support which is different or additional to that available to their peers. This recognition is sufficient that the devolved administrations, and before them the UK Government, felt it necessary to give this provision legal force through statute and regulation. The Codes all derive from that recognition. All of them clearly state their own legal basis and make explicit reference to the laws from which they draw their authority, and allied areas of legislation. This accounts for their bureaucratic style in that they are all seeking to build a bridge between the formality of national law and the practice that will be recognisable to professionals, parents and young people.

This governmental recognition of the needs and entitlements of children and young people is reflected in clear statements in all of the codes:

“Our vision for children with special educational needs and disabilities is the same as for all children and young people – that they achieve well in their early years, at school and in college, and lead happy and fulfilled lives.”
(Page 11 of the English code)

“This SEN Code of Practice introduces a new SEN and Inclusion Framework (the SEN Framework) which emerged from DE’s review of special education and inclusion. It places the child firmly at the centre of the graduated response to meeting the needs of children with SEN. It aims to help children with SEN achieve improved outcomes and fulfil their potential.” (Page 3 of the draft Northern Ireland code)

“The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (“the Act”) 1 provides the legal framework for identifying and addressing the additional support needs of children and young people who face a barrier, or barriers, to learning. The Act aims to ensure that all children and young people are provided with the necessary support to help them work towards achieving their full potential.” (Page 6 of the Scottish code)

¹⁶ Page 42, “Dam Buster Barnes Wallis the lost visionary of British Aviation”, Morris, R., (2023)

“The Act, together with this code and regulations made under the Act, provides the statutory system for meeting the additional learning needs (ALN) of children and young people. It places the learners’ views, wishes and feelings at the heart of the process of planning the support required to enable them to learn effectively and achieve their full potential.” (Page 1 of the Welsh code)

It is therefore unsurprising that all of the codes emphasise the rights of children and young people.

Recognition of the rights of the child

All of the codes, including the Northern Ireland 2005 supplement and the draft version make specific reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and take account of at least some of its provisions.

“Children have a right to receive and impart information, to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them from the early years. Their views should be given due weight according to their age, maturity and capability.” (Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).¹⁷

In 2020 the Scottish Government brought forward the UNCRC (Incorporation)(Scotland) Bill. This Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament and would have seen all 42 clauses of UNCRC incorporated into Scots law. However, in October 2021 a ruling of the Supreme Court was that 4 sections of the Bill went beyond the devolved powers of the Scottish Parliament. An amended Bill is currently being produced. This notwithstanding there is unanimity across the four jurisdictions of the centrality of children being involved in the decisions that affect them. Similarly, all of the codes give emphasis to the effective engagement of parents.

Entitlement to education in a mainstream setting

There is, too, significant agreement that children’s needs should be met whenever possible in the setting of a mainstream school. Notably, too, they all acknowledge that parents, in fulfilling their legal obligation to secure a suitable education for their child have the right to “educate them otherwise”, most often done by education at home¹⁸. Although the codes give descriptions which differ in detail and content of how an entitlement to education in a mainstream school should be delivered for children requiring additional support, it is stated:

¹⁷ Page 20, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

¹⁸ It should be noted that although the right to educate a child outwith formal schools is common to all four jurisdictions the legal conditions under which this can be done varies across the UK.

“The Children and Families Act 2014 secures the general presumption in law of mainstream education in relation to decisions about where children and young people with SEN should be educated and the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for disabled people.”¹⁹ (England)

“Children with special educational needs, including those with statements, should, wherever appropriate and taking into account the wishes of their parents, be educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools.”²⁰ (Northern Ireland)

“An education authority is required to provide that education in mainstream schools unless certain exceptions apply.”²¹ (Scotland)

“...the expectation is that mainstream FEIs, and in some cases, maintained schools, will usually be able to meet the education or training needs of the majority of young people who have ALN.”²² (Wales)

Acceptance of the principle that some children will require additional support

The view is therefore universal that so far as possible, and with certain exceptions, that children should be educated alongside their peers and that this may need some form of response from the class teacher or school. This response might be at a relatively low level through a modification to the curriculum or in teaching methods. There is, however, also a shared recognition that even at this level, a degree of additionality may be required in terms of planning for learning or in resources.

Provision may require to be safeguarded using a formal document with legal status

This additionality at its extreme culminates in a recognition that some children and young people's needs will be of such a nature that their interests need to be safeguarded using a document that has formal legal status. All four jurisdictions make provision for such a document:

- England – an education and healthcare plan (EHCP);
- Northern Ireland – statement (of special educational needs);
- Scotland – co-ordinated support plan (CSP); and
- Wales – individual development plan (IDP).

¹⁹ Page 25, *ibid*

²⁰ Page 2, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015 Operative Date 01 September 1998

²¹ Page 54, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

²² Page 175, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Although the terminology associated with each of these documents varies, in all cases the codes set out with some rigour the processes, timescales and criteria under which they are developed, including rights of appeal. The formality of these documents is underpinned, and emphasised, by specifications of who can contribute to the document, the headings to be used for its content, and how aspects of its provision can be formally appealed. The amount of space given to these plans in the codes together with consideration of tiered approaches to provision which can, ultimately, culminate in the writing of one of these documents underlines their fundamental importance in each jurisdiction without exception.

The production of these formal, legally binding, documents across the jurisdictions also envisages multi-agency co-operation. So, although educational services lie at the heart of producing and reviewing this child-specific document other services, most prominently health services and social services are expected to participate in their production, if appropriate. That participation is given force of law. It is also expected, therefore, that other agencies will play a role in appropriate support to children and young people more generally, including contributing to assessments.

Consideration of disability

The involvement of health services becomes particularly important when considering matters to do with disability. All of the codes consider the issue of disability as it relates to supporting children and young people. In the case of England, Scotland and Wales the common point of legal reference is the Equality Act, 2010 with a shared definition of “disability”. In the case of Northern Ireland new statutory duties were introduced under the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the 2016 Act)²³. All of the codes therefore make frequent references to “disability” as legally defined. It should be noted, however, that the English code uniquely integrates the term “disability” within its prevailing nomenclature of “special educational needs and disability” (SEND). For discussion purposes the generally interpreted relationship between children or young people who have a disability as universally identified and one who requires some form of educational support, as variously identified across the jurisdictions is summarised in figure 1, on the following page.

²³ Section 1.4, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

Figure 1: Schematic relationship between disability and children and young people requiring additional educational support ²⁴



As figure 1 illustrates, while there is substantial overlap between children and young people classed as having a disability and those requiring some form of additional educational support, these are not coterminous concepts. Neither are these concepts static, changes in the size of these groups, represented by the size of the circles in figure 1, are reported across the four UK jurisdictions particularly with a growth in the numbers categorised as having SEN, ASN or ALN. The nature of this relationship between the categories is well explained in the English code:

“Many children and young people who have SEN may have a disability under the Equality Act 2010 – that is ‘...a physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’. This definition provides a relatively low threshold and includes more children than many realise: ‘long-term’ is defined as ‘a year or more’ and ‘substantial’ is defined as ‘more than minor or trivial’. This definition includes sensory impairments such as those affecting sight or hearing, and long-term health conditions such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, and cancer. Children and young people with such conditions do not necessarily have SEN, but there is a significant overlap between disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Where a disabled child or young person requires special educational provision, they will also be covered by the SEN definition.”²⁵

²⁴ That is who have “special educational needs” in England and Northern Ireland, “additional support needs” in Scotland or “additional learning needs” in Wales.

²⁵ Page 16, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

The implications of this difference is explained in the Northern Ireland code:

“Within the SEN Framework, whilst recognising the existence of a medical condition, disability or development delay, it is the child’s learning difficulty, (see paragraph 1.19) which calls for special educational provision to be made and the child’s response to that provision which is key. For the child with a disability but who does not have a SEN the delivery of reasonable adjustments is key.”²⁸

This point is echoed in the Scottish code:

“It should be noted that not all disabled children, whether under the age of 3 years or not, will necessarily have additional support needs; for example, those who are disabled by having medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma or HIV may not require additional support to enable them to benefit from school education. However, if the education authority do determine that the child has additional support needs arising from a disability”²⁶

Similarly, the Welsh code states:

“Not all children and young people who have a disability (as defined by the Equality Act 2010), will have ALN. It is only where the child or young person’s disability prevents or hinders them from making use of educational or training facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream FEIs, and this calls for ALP, that they have ALN (unless they have ALN because they have a learning difficulty that calls for ALP)”²⁷.

In terms of impact on provision for children and young people the central issue is that the implications of a child being categorised as “disabled” within the legal definition has different rights to one who is categorised as requiring additional support, however defined. Some children, of course, gain rights from both sets of legislation. In its extreme the processes for handling any appeals against decisions on provision differ between whether a child is viewed as being disabled or whether the educational support is adequate. In simplest terms a classification of having a disability requires a response of reasonable adjustment to mitigate the effects of that disability. In contrast the idea of educational need, however defined, is about provision of support to enable a child or young person to fully capitalise on their education. For any parent, therefore, seeking to ensure their children’s rights are respected it is important to understand which part of the population applies to their child as:

- a) minstream;
- b) disabled, as legally defined;
- c) having needs requiring support for their education; and
- d) being both b) and c)

²⁶ Page 41, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

²⁷ Page 33, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

²⁸ Section 3.6, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

For an armed forces family this issue is more complex. The definition of disability may, in some circumstances be a matter of subjective rather than objective judgement, and how that judgement is applied may vary from area to area. As explained in the Welsh code there is “Minister of the Crown guidance on matters to be taken into account in determining whether a person has a disability.”²⁹ In other words, the definition of disability can only be subject to guidance, not absolute definition; and such guidance need only be “taken into account”, not applied rigorously. Therefore, a child held to have a disability in one area may not be so categorised in another area. It is much more probable, however, that the decisions related to additional educational support will vary between areas. In illustration of the impact of this variability in 2021–2022 5,600 appeals were considered by the SEND tribunal in England. Of these appeals, some 96.3% were successful, meaning that only 3.7% of decisions went in favour of the local authority.³⁰ By 2022–23 this figure had further declined with only 2% of appeals rejected.³¹ Further, the English Ombudsman’s Annual Review of Complaints 2021–22 shows that the Ombudsman’s overall uphold rate was just under 90% for SEND, the highest uphold rate of any area of LA activity.³² Furthermore, and as discussed in chapter 7 the number of children identified as having additional support needs in Scotland is much higher than those identified as special educational needs in England, for example. Children and young people may, therefore, move into and out of these definitions, with their different entitlements, as they move around the UK. There is therefore a high level of subjectivity in officialdom of whether a child is entitled to support or not and this is the situation that will confront parents, particularly those who are mobile like armed forces families.

Implications

Armed forces families need to understand clearly under which legal definitions their child’s needs will be addressed.

That understanding will need to be revisited with each move to a new jurisdiction.

³⁰ Page 9, Special Educational Needs and Disability: Improving Local Authority Decision Making, Administrative Justice Council, Report of the Administrative Justice Council’s Working Group on Special Educational Needs and Disability July 2023

³¹ Tribunal Statistics Quarterly July to September 2023, published 14 December 2023 Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2023 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

³² Page 28, *ibid*

Parental engagement

All of the codes, across jurisdictions emphasise the importance of the role of parents. For example, the English code states in its early pages:

“Local authorities must ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision. Early years providers, schools and colleges should also take steps to ensure that young people and parents are actively supported in contributing to needs assessments, developing and reviewing Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. Specifically, local authorities must • ensure the child’s parents or the young person are fully included in the EHC needs assessment process from the start, are fully aware of their opportunities to offer views and information, and are consulted about the content of the plan.”³³

This early reference is supported in other places, throughout the document to the importance of parental involvement.

The Northern Ireland code similarly states:

“The knowledge, views and experience of parents are vital. Effective assessment and provision will best be secured where there is partnership between parents and schools, Boards and other agencies.”³⁴

This code at various points goes on to further emphasise the importance of parental involvement. For example in section 3.46 it provides a detailed aide memoire designed to assist parent in being able to make an effective contribution to the assessment process for a statement. This approach is echoed in the statements in the 2005 code which in its own right draws on paragraphs 2.21 to 2.27 (Partnership with Parents) in the 1998 code:

“Partnership with parents continues to play a key role in promoting a culture of co-operation between parents, schools, Boards and others. It is therefore essential that all professionals actively seek to work with parents in a meaningful way and value the contribution that they make.”³⁵

³³ Page 20, *ibid*

³⁴ Page 2, Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative 1998

³⁵ Page 4, Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative 2005

This approach is continued in the draft code for Northern Ireland which as part of its section on “essential policies and practices” envisages:

“For parents, children over compulsory school age and other children to be provided with advice, support and information by the EA to assist them to understand the SEN Framework, exercise their rights and make informed decisions.”³⁶

The Scottish code is equally strong on the issue of the role of parents, and makes very clear statements to that effect, including:

“All professionals, schools, education authorities and appropriate agencies should seek actively to involve parents in their work with children. They should recognise and value parent’s unique contribution, take their views into consideration and regard them as vital partners in their children’s learning. Professionals must take responsibility for encouraging good relationships with families based on trust, openness and effective communication. ...This can be best achieved by strong relationships, good communication and when parents share an understanding of the framework, planning arrangements and systems of support available.”³⁷

This approach emphasising the centrality of parental rights in decision making is repeated in the Welsh code:

“A person exercising functions under the Act which relate to an individual child or young person **must** (sic) have regard to-

- (a) the views, wishes and feelings of the child and the child’s parent or the young person,***
- (b) the importance of the child and the child’s parent or the young person participating as fully as possible in decisions relating to the exercise of the function concerned, and***
- (c) the importance of the child and the child’s parent or young person being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions.”³⁸***

It therefore follows that no matter where an armed forces family might move to in the UK, they can reasonably expect to be fully involved in the decisions related to their child’s education and all aspects of decisions affecting how learning will be supported should that be necessary under the terms of these codes.

³⁶ Section 1.21, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

³⁷ Page 116, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

³⁸ Page 42, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Advice and information

In order to breathe life into the concepts of parental rights and the rights of children all four jurisdictions recognise the importance of providing information and advice. A more detailed review of these advice services is given in Chapter 5. Here comments are confined to those directly relevant to the national codes. The English code devotes a full chapter (chapter 2) to “Impartial Information, support and advice” and supports this at various other points, most notably in its detailed specification of the “Local offer” given in chapter 4. It is, however, appropriate at this point to note that there is a real difference between the clear intention, as set out in the code, and the practice as it is delivered on the ground. It has been noted in a recent report that:

“The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) is under-resourced and not every family who needs support can access it. Mediators see parents who say they couldn’t get access to SENDIASS and parents who say they’ve never heard of it. Mediators also hear of parents who requested SENDIASS support at mediation, but this was not available for capacity reasons. Lack of staffing capacity further impacts on SENDIASS availability to attend mediation.”³⁹

This given, the English code does have a specific reference for where parents in the Armed Forces can obtain information and advice, and this is flagged in the table of contents:

“Support for parents in HM Armed Forces
Parents serving in HM Armed Forces can also access the Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) – an information, advice and support service established specifically for Service parents. It covers any issue relating to their children’s education, including SEN. More information about CEAS may be found on the CEAS website – a link is given in the References section under Chapter 2.”⁴⁰

The 1998 iteration of the Northern Ireland code is relatively light on the provision of information. Section 2.8 of this code imposes a duty on schools (rather than the education and library boards at that stage in history) to publish their special educational needs policy and make it available to parents.⁴¹ This position was refined in the 2005 supplement due to a development in the disability legislation, thus under Article 4 of SENDO 2005 a new clause was introduced imposing a duty on education and library boards to provide information and advice to parents. In the new draft code a full section, amounting to 10 pages including diagrams, is provided on the subject of information and advice.

³⁹ Page 24, Special Educational Needs and Disability: Improving Local Authority Decision Making, Administrative Justice Council, Report of the Administrative Justice Council’s Working Group on Special Educational Needs and Disability, July 2023

⁴⁰ Page 36, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁴¹ Page 22, Supplement to the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative 2005

A very detailed specification of how information and advice is to be provided and made accessible is found in the Scottish code.⁴² This description is comprehensive and makes provisions at national, local authority and school levels. There is also specific provision for Scottish Ministers, acting under the Additional Support for Learning (Sources of Information) (Scotland) Order 2016 to specify ‘Children in Scotland: Working for Children and Their Families, trading as Enquire’, ‘The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance Limited’ and Govan Law Centre Trust to act as sources of information and advice independently from the service providers.

The Welsh code, similarly, provides a very detailed specification on the availability of advice and information. This is contained in chapter 6 of the code and amounts to six pages of description. Like the English code the Welsh code draws specific attention to information advice available from the Ministry of Defence on the education of armed forces children:

“Children and young people of Service Personnel

The Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP) provide a single Ministry of Defence (MOD) focus for all issues related to children and young people with a parent who is Service Personnel (“Service children and young people”). The Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) are part of DCYP and provide advice, support and guidance regarding the educational well-being of the children and young people belonging to families in all 3 Services and eligible MoD civilians who are based overseas.”⁴³

Across the UK therefore, there is a very strong commitment to the provision of information and advice to parents, children and young people. In all cases these services must be free of charge. Armed forces families should therefore be made aware of this availability of these services as an entitlement, no matter where they live. As pointed out in the Welsh and English codes, the Ministry of Defence through the former CEAS and DCYP, now incorporated into armed forces families and Safeguarding can be a valuable source of advice to families, education authorities and schools.

⁴² Pages 140–142, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁴³ Page 199, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Resolving disagreements

Having set out these commitments to working with children, young people and families together with providing wide ranging advice and support all four jurisdictions also set out mechanisms to resolve disagreements between service users and providers. These mechanisms exhibit a number of common features.

All jurisdictions espouse the early resolution, or indeed avoidance, of disagreements not least through the effective engagement of parents, children and young people. But all also acknowledge that this might not be possible and therefore require the provision of alternative mechanisms are necessary. For that reason, there is also a universal requirement that information and advice on how disagreements might be resolved should be accessible and freely available. However, the actual arrangements for resolution of disagreements even within jurisdictions is complex. The English code for example provides a table describing the various “avenues for complaint and redress” that covers two landscape pages.⁴⁴ This level of complexity is also evident in the Scottish code which provides a flow chart in order to attempt to simplify the various routes to resolve disagreements.⁴⁵

The pattern of provision on disagreement resolution is illustrated in Table 9, below. Some of the detailed differences in these arrangements will be discussed later (see chapter 6), but as Table 9 illustrates there is broad agreement on a number of key features towards resolving disagreements. The first of these is that there requires to be provision between, on the one hand, the internal authority and school-based processes that promote good relationships with parents and young people and on the other the formality of a tribunal. It should be noted that although provision of these intermediate levels may be required this does not mean necessarily that parents or young people have to use them before escalation to the next stage. References in the codes to these levels vary in terminology and formality. Thus, while England and Wales use “disagreement resolution”, Scotland and Northern Ireland refer to “dispute resolution”. Despite the prevalence of these type of arrangements across the codes, as Table 9 illustrates, the level of formality and the way they are integrated into wider arrangements varies between jurisdictions. A clear example is that use of dispute resolution in Scotland entails reference to the Scottish Ministers, while no ministerial involvement is required at this stage elsewhere in the UK. Similarly, in Wales, the sole reference to mediation is **“Independent person(s) helping to resolve disagreements will need a range of experience, knowledge and qualifications, including for example: training and experience in disagreement resolution, e.g. mediation”⁴⁶** Mediation in Wales is therefore seen as an integral, and minor, part of “Avoiding and resolving disagreements”.

⁴⁴ Pages 246–247, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁴⁵ Page 134, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁴⁶ Page 138, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Table 9: The pattern of formal mechanisms across the UK to resolve disagreements

	Disagreement Resolution	Mediation	Tribunal
England	Disagreement resolution provided by local authority, but independent from it	Specific to EHCPs Must be independent contracted service	The First-Tier Tribunal (SEN and Disability) also considers disability issues
Northern Ireland	No	No	Special Educational Needs Tribunal (SENT)
1998 code			
2005 code	A cross-Board independent Dispute Avoidance and Resolutions Service (DARS) established	Officers with “mediation skills” to be available within DARS	Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST) responsibilities now include disability
Draft code	Dispute resolution provided by education authority but independent from it	Only available to cases appealable to Tribunal. Service must be independent of education authority	SENDIST
Scotland	Dispute resolution provided by the education authority but accessed by application to Scottish Ministers who appoint external adjudicator	Relates to any function under the Act. ⁴⁷ Must be independent of authority.	Additional Support Needs Tribunals for Scotland (ASNTS)
Wales	“Avoiding and resolving disagreements”. Process is delivered in-house but provision for an independent person to be involved	Mentioned only in the context of disagreement resolution	Education Tribunal for Wales

Ultimately, all jurisdictions have, at their apex, the availability of a specialist tribunal, dealing with this area of educational provision.

⁴⁷ The Education (Additional Support for Learning)(Scotland) Act 2004, as amended

Implications

An armed forces family moving between jurisdictions will encounter superficially similar structures to resolve disagreements. These start with informal arrangements but escalate to the formality of a tribunal. With the arguable exception of Wales this is universally seen as a three-stage process. This may appear reassuring at first sight.

However, even when considered at this level of analysis there are important differences between jurisdictions. Those families who, through their own often hard-fought experience in one jurisdiction may quite reasonably believe that they are familiar with procedures for resolving disagreements, but will encounter disconcerting differences. The terminology and structure may look the same, but there are important differences.

Those armed forces families, particularly those versed in the procedures of another jurisdiction will need detailed and sensitive support to understand those used in any new jurisdiction.

Data protection

All four codes make some reference to data protection and the need to comply with the relevant legislation. This issue is relevant in the context of this discussion in relation to the transfer of information. References in the English code are relatively restricted with only three references to the Data Protection Act 1998 with a general statement on the need to comply with the legislation. It should be noted that the English code, unlike those of other jurisdictions, predates the General Data Protection Regulations introduced as a result of a ruling in the European Union in 2016 cited below. The Northern Ireland draft code makes 15 separate references to data protection regulations. This code helpfully provides a glossary and clarifies the legal authority as:

“GDPR: means regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of natural data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation).”⁴⁸

In practice, the Northern Irish advice relates to the storage of information and the transfer of information with the requirement to secure appropriate consent. The actual significance of this in practice clearly emerges from the Scottish code amongst its six references to data protection:

“When a child or young person who has had a co-ordinated support plan in Scotland subsequently moves to England, Wales or Northern Ireland, the education authority which prepared the plan, can disclose the plan, or extracts from it to the relevant authority for that area, where the original authority considers it necessary to do so, in the interests of the child or young person, to whom the plan relates. Any disclosure must be in accordance with the law on data protection, human rights, confidentiality and any other relevant law.”⁴⁹

Amongst its 27 references to data protection, the Welsh code articulates a similar warning.

“The code does not aim to provide exhaustive guidance on all aspects of the ALN system. In particular relevant persons will need to be mindful of, and comply with, data protection law and their own organisation’s data protection and processing policies when processing personal data including sharing it with others.”⁵⁰

Therefore, all four codes take account of data protection and offer advice on this subject. Armed forces parents and young people can take reassurance that their rights with regard to the protection of personal information, its storage, management and confidentiality have the same legal protections throughout the UK. As the quotation from the Welsh codes shows, however, this protection is subject to the local interpretation of responsibilities. The Scottish code quotation above highlights a dilemma when children move from one area to another and specifically if this involves a move between jurisdictions. It is clearly in the interests of the child that their learning should not be unnecessarily disrupted by a move, this suggests that an efficient, timeous transfer of information on the child should occur at the time of the move. However, this principle is not unrestricted in the data protection environment, and the local interpretation of GDPR may act as an obstacle, real or imagined, to efficient transfer of information. In its worst case this may mean that any assessments of SEND/SEN/ASN/ALN have to start from scratch, delaying effective support and therefore introducing a barrier to learning.

Implications

Data protection is a universal right of individuals. This protection may act as an obstacle to efficient transfer of information. Since the rights of young people and parents are central to unlocking this barrier, armed forces parents need to be made aware of their rights, their implications and the role they can play in ensuring that transfer of information at the time of a move is effective and timeous.

⁴⁹ Page 91, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁵⁰ Page 91, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Interagency co-operation and multi-disciplinary working

One of the challenges posed by data protection is the issue of inter-agency co-operation. All of the codes have clear statements on the desirability of multi-disciplinary working. This is given visible expression in the names of the statutory documents which may be produced in support of children and young people notably the education and healthcare plans (EHCPs) in England and co-ordinated support plans (CSPs) in Scotland. The precise references vary according to the various structures in the four jurisdictions, but the main agencies identified are education, health and social services.^{51 52 53} However, the emphasis that is given to each agency, beyond education, varies between the codes. The overall approach, which would be common across the UK, is summarised in the English code:

“If children and young people with SEN or disabilities are to achieve their ambitions and the best possible educational and other outcomes, including getting a job and living as independently as possible, local education, health and social care services should work together to ensure they get the right support.”⁵⁴

The Scottish code makes a similar statement, advocating “a holistic view of children” and that “education authorities need to play their part in ensuring that there is effective communication, collaboration and integrated assessment, planning, action and review when other agencies are involved.”⁵⁵ Such a view is central to the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) model used in Scotland and a description of which is reproduced in the Scottish code. Both the Northern Irish code (section 6.39 in the 1998 version) and the Welsh code (pages 234–239) devote specific sections of guidance on interagency co-operation.

⁵¹ Section 9 (12 pages) in The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁵² Page 30, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁵³ Pages 234–239, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

⁵⁴ Page 24, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁵⁵ Page 29, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Summary

The systems for providing additional educational support to children and young people across the United Kingdom share a number of important characteristics:

- Children and young people requiring additional educational support, however defined, are recognised in law and have the safeguard of a specification of service set out in detail in the codes of practice.
- There is a general recognition of the rights of the child and in particular that their views should on provision should wherever possible be taken into account.
- Education wherever possible should be in a mainstream setting.
- Additional support for effective learning may be required.
- Some children and young people may require a formal document with legal status to safeguard their interests.
- The implications of disability for the education of children and young people are recognised.
- Parents have a right to be fully engaged in the decisions affecting their children.
- Advice and information must be freely available and accessible.
- There is entitlement to access to services to resolve disagreements, which includes mediation and, if necessary, referral to an independent tribunal specialising in such matters.
- The requirements to safeguard personal data are universal.
- Interagency co-operation and multi-disciplinary working lie at the centre of planning and delivering provision across all four jurisdictions.

There are some differences in detail on the specifics of these issues of principle, as discussed. However, these are major areas of commonality and agreement. An armed forces family moving into a new jurisdiction, and who believe they have a child deserving additional support will therefore find a system which to outward appearances will be very similar to the one they have left. This will be true irrespective of the direction of movement.

Implications

Given these marked similarities between the systems in each jurisdiction it is possible to provide armed forces families, or any family who moves, with a statement of basic entitlement. This statement, based on areas of common experience, will have the considerable advantage of capitalising on their understanding of a system with which they are familiar. It would reduce any need for them to have to master a completely new body of knowledge. Such an approach would also better enable an understanding of where systems are different.

The development of such a shared statement would also significantly improve the understanding of professionals across all jurisdictions, establishing a dialogue based on a common understanding of shared ideas. That dialogue in turn would contribute to the better exchange of information. Most of all it would increase the understanding of areas of difference, which may act to remove some of the barriers identified in the next chapter.



Chapter 4:

Differences Between the UK Codes of Practice and Their Significance for Armed Forces Families

“Some Services families are very on the ball, but every nation, LA and school works differently. Most of our pupils will come from England, Scotland or Germany. When these come into Wales it means that there are new rules and regulations for them to deal with that the devolved administrations have all put in place which makes things difficult.” (School staff member in Wales) ⁵⁶

Having discussed the similarities between the codes, it is important to consider where they differ and the potential impact on armed forces families. Many of these differences will also be relevant to any family moving between jurisdictions.

References to the Armed Forces

The Armed Forces Covenant states:

“Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.”

Across public services and private industry and commerce organisations have committed to the Armed Forces Covenant on a voluntary basis. Additionally, there is now a statutory duty which came into force in November 2022:

“The Armed Forces Covenant Duty is the following legal obligation.
When a specified body exercises a relevant function, it must have due regard to:

- a. the unique obligations of, and sacrifices made by, the Armed Forces;*
- b. the principle that it is desirable to remove disadvantages arising for Service people from membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces; and,*
- c. the principle that special provision for Service people may be justified by the effects on such people of membership, or former membership, of the Armed Forces.” ⁵⁶*

⁵⁶ Page 29, Llewellyn M., Duggan B., Graham S., and McDonald M., “Research on Experiences of Service Families with Children with Additional Learning Needs in Education in Wales, Final Report”, for SSCE Cymru Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales and Arad Research May 2018

Education, housing and health services are within the scope of this “due regard” duty. It is the case that this new statutory duty post-dates all of the codes. (The recent Northern Ireland code was consulted upon and drafted before the new duty came into force.) This notwithstanding, it might reasonably be expected that the wide commitment to the Covenant under voluntary arrangements would have been sufficient to promote appropriate references in the codes across the UK.

All of the codes make some reference to armed forces children, sometimes referred to as “service” children. Some are much more detailed than others. The English code draws attention to the Ministry of Defence’s Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) as a source of advice for parents, as described earlier here.

Another key reference in the English SEND code is in the section dealing with the process for producing an Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP). In this very specific context, again the suggestion in the code is to seek advice, as necessary, from CEAS:

“In relation EHCPs: Any other advice and information which the local authority considers appropriate for a satisfactory assessment, for example: ... in the case of children of members of the Armed Forces, from the Children’s Education Advisory Service.”⁵⁷

However, the main text in the English code is provided in a complete section of some 12 paragraphs entitled “Action to take in respect of Service children with SEN.”⁵⁸

This section of the code starts by reminding readers of the Armed Forces Covenant and its implications. It then covers a number of issues:

- The effective and timely receipt and despatch of pupil records, including schools elsewhere in the UK and overseas. It makes reference to the pupil information profile (PIP) developed by CEAS.
- Ensuring in all reviews of armed forces children that relevant service-related issues such as mobility are considered.
- Ensuring that all relevant issues are considered based on the needs of the child, and “not related to the amount of time they have left in a particular school.”
- Use of the service pupil premium to improve SEN provision for armed forces children.
- Local authorities should take account of the needs of armed forces communities within their boundaries and to seek advice from CEAS.
- Authorities to transfer EHCPs within 15 days to the “new” authority within 15 days of when they first become aware of the move.
- The “new” authority must inform parents within 6 weeks of the transfer of the EHCP of any arrangements for review. Until that review the provision in the plan must be implemented (other than the named school).

⁵⁷ Page 157, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁵⁸ Sections 10.55 – 10.59, Pages 219–221, *ibid*

- Authorities are expected to work together to minimise any delays in support or provision.
- Use all available evidence when considering provision, including “statements made for Service children in Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Co-ordinated Support Plans made for them in Scotland and the Service Children’s Assessment of Need (SCAN) completed for them by SCE.”
- Ensuring continuity of any agreed personal budgets.
- Guidance for the First-Tier Tribunal (SEN and Disability) to take account of “service-induced” mobility in decisions on the appropriateness of provision.
- Signposting to CEAS for further advice.

Taken together, this is a comprehensive treatment which addresses many of the major issues in administering the movement of armed forces children, including across jurisdictions. There are however gaps in the guidance. The emphasis is very much on mobility and its administrative effects rather than the learning needs it may create. For understandable reasons, given their legal status, the focus is very much on EHCPs and their transfer. Not all children who require additional support will qualify for an EHCP. It is just as important that there are efficient processes for this group. With those exceptions, the intentions of the code in respect of promoting the aims of the Armed Forces Covenant and protecting the interests of armed forces children falling under the SEND definition is clear enough. To that degree, it is very welcome. It should be noted also that the reference to the service pupil premium creates issues in that this support is only of relevance to England so there is no transferability to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Much less detail is provided in the Scottish code in which there is only one reference to armed forces children:

“Children or young people may require additional support for a variety of reasons and may include those who: ...are children of parents in the Armed Forces.”⁵⁹

Although this reference has the merit of being stated early in the Scottish code, it is given as the fourth in a list of 20 other potential reasons. For illustrative purpose it sits between “are being bullied” and “are particularly able or talented”. The official position of the Scottish Government is further explained on their website:

“The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to identify, assess and provide for the additional support needs of all children for whose education they are responsible. Additional support needs are broadly defined, including those which might impact on children from armed forces families, such as transitions, interrupted learning and dealing with separation and loss.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Page 11, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁶⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/scottish-armed-forces-education-support-group>

Given this position, that the needs of armed forces children will be met through the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004 it might have been expected that the code issued in support of that legislation would contain much more detail than it does. The Scottish code, in this respect, is the least detailed and informative of all the four UK jurisdictions

The Northern Irish code issued in 1998 might therefore be anticipated to have little or no reference to the Armed Forces since it pre-dates the Armed Forces Covenant. But this is not the case. In fact, it contains some strong statements. For example, it requires that the advice of Service Children's Education should always be sought:

“Boards should as far as possible follow up suggestions from parents of other agencies or individuals who might be able to provide relevant advice. In addition, the Board should approach any other body which it considers might be able to contribute to the assessment.”

This point is re-emphasised in the section specifying how a statement of special educational needs should be compiled for a child:

“All the advice obtained and taken into consideration during the assessment process must be attached as appendices to the statement. This must include the following: In particular, where the child's parent is a serving member of the Armed Forces, advice from Service Children's Education.”⁶¹

Such a requirement carries a legal implication which if ignored would be challengeable. In support of this principle, the Northern Ireland 1998 code also provides a specific section of guidance for parents advising them:

“Where the child's parent is a serving member of the Armed Forces, advice should always be sought from Service Children's Education.”⁶²

It is even suggested that a parent's employment in the Armed Forces might be a reason for considering opening a statement of special educational needs.

“Where the child's parents are in the Armed Forces, and their frequent moves might significantly disrupt effective special educational provision for the child.”⁶³

⁶¹Page 43, Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs Operative 1998

⁶²Page 38, *ibid*

⁶³Page 40, *ibid*

The final reference to armed forces children in the Northern Ireland 1998 code is in the Glossary where the role of “Service Children’s Education” is described:

“Service Children’s Education:

*Service Children’s Education oversees the education of U.K. service children abroad. It is funded by the Ministry of Defence and operates its own schools as well as providing advice to parents.”*⁶⁴

Having established this position in 1998, the new draft code is equally explicit. The requirement to seek advice from the “relevant Directorate” in the Ministry of Defence is repeated:

*“For the purpose of making an assessment, the EA is required to seek educational advice and information (which should not be sought from any person who is not a teacher). The educational advice is required to be sought from: ... c) if any of the child’s parents is a serving member of Her Majesty’s Armed Forces the educational advice should be sought from the relevant Directorate of the Ministry of Defence.”*⁶⁵

Similarly, the point first found in the 1998 code is repeated that if a parent is employed in the Armed Forces, then a statement of special educational needs might be considered. This is further explained by providing a justification in terms of possible disruption to effective education caused by mobility.

*“However, the following indicators, would suggest that it might be appropriate for the EA to make a formal Statement identifying the child’s needs, the full range of provision to be made and the review arrangements to apply, depending on the precise circumstances of each case: ... c) where the child’s parent is a serving member of HM Armed Forces, and their frequent moves might significantly disrupt effective education provision for the child.”*⁶⁶

Having taken this position, more information and detail is provided in the new draft code. An explanation is included under the headings of “mobility”, “social and emotional”, and “attendance”. Those officials taking decisions about the support to children are being directed, therefore, beyond the mere status of families to potential areas of concern that they should be considered in order to assess needs.

“Children whose Parents or Guardians are Serving in the Armed Forces
Children who have a parent who is a serving member of the Armed Forces are distinctive from other groups of children in a number of ways such as:

⁶⁴ Page 89, *ibid*

⁶⁵ Page 43, Section 4, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁶⁶ Page 51, Section 4, *ibid*

- **Mobility** – *The children are more likely than their peers to have attended a number of different schools due to the nature of service life. In addition, the change of school can occur at almost any time during the academic year. This mobility may have a disruptive effect on the special educational provision for that child.*
- **Social and emotional** – *Children may experience stress or greater social and emotional pressures than their peers as their parent may be away for long periods of time.*
- **Attendance** – *The children may have lower attendance rates than their peers for a number of reasons such as, their parent often requests compassionate leave for the child from school before or after a posting.”⁶⁷*

The draft Northern Ireland code also repeats the signposting towards the Ministry of Defence as a source of advice. However, the organisational focus has changed in an important respect from 1998. The 1998 code was focused on the education and library boards but the new, draft, advice focuses on schools in the first instance. This takes provision, and accountability, nearer to the point of service delivery, and the child.

“The Service Children’s Education (SCE), Ministry of Defence, can be contacted by schools who are seeking advice with regard to children of service personnel. All the advice obtained for a statutory assessment is required to be taken into consideration in determining whether a Statement is necessary. ...Should a Statement be necessary, the advice and information are required to be attached as appendices to the child’s proposed Statement.”⁶⁸

Northern Ireland therefore has some very clear statements, some aimed directly at parents on entitlement. The position has developed between 1998 and the new draft code, with more detail on relevant areas of need being provided. Some clear points of accountability are also established for families. There is, however, no specific mention of the implications of a move to or from other areas of the United Kingdom.

The approach in Northern Ireland focuses on the needs of individual children and their families. The Welsh code of practice, like the English code, includes a broader perspective. It encourages local authorities to approach this issue from a more strategic level and to consider the needs of the wider armed forces community. This approach is consistent with the notion of multi-disciplinary working to support young people espoused by all the codes of practice and discussed earlier.

“When reviewing the sufficiency of its arrangements (including whether they are effective), local authorities might consider: the particular needs of any Service communities within their boundaries when providing or planning ALP for Service children and young people with ALN (see Chapter 18 of the code for further guidance on such children and young people).”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Page 9, Section 10, ibid

⁶⁸ Pages 10–11, Section 10, ibid

⁶⁹ Page 67–68, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Having made this statement about planning at a strategic level for armed forces children, the Welsh code then deals specifically with the issue. It describes in some detail some of the background to the education of this group of children and young people together with an identification of which department of the Ministry of Defence has responsibilities in this area. Having done this it explains some of the challenges that can be faced by these children together with the implications both for learning and those who provide support. Within this description the Welsh code, echoing a similar point in the English code, identifies that issue may arise from the operational deployment of siblings:

“This chapter deals with children and young people in specific circumstances. 18.2. These groups are... (f) children of Service personnel.”⁷⁰

Children and young people of Service Personnel

The Directorate of Children and Young People (DCYP) provides a single Ministry of Defence (MOD) focus for all issues related to children and young people with a parent who is Service Personnel (“Service children and young people”). The Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) are part of DCYP and provide advice, support and guidance regarding the educational well-being of the children and young people belonging to families in all 3 Services and eligible MOD civilians who are based overseas. MOD Schools provides mainstream education for Service children and young people in some overseas locations. As the resources available overseas are different from those in the UK, MOD services complete an MOD Assessment of Supportability Overseas for all Service children and young people with complex needs before an overseas posting is agreed.

Service children and young people may face difficulties that are unique to the nature of their parent’s employment. These needs may arise from:

- (a) Service-induced mobility – Service Personnel may relocate more often than the rest of the population and, sometimes, at short notice. Such transitions need to be well managed to avoid Service children and young people with ALN experiencing delays in having their needs identified and met;*
- (b) the deployment of serving parents to operational arenas may result in a Service child or young person experiencing anxiety, dips in educational performance and/or emotional difficulties, which could contribute towards or exacerbate ALN. Children and young people may also be affected similarly by siblings’ deployment.*

Local authorities should take account of the particular needs of any Service communities within their boundaries when providing or planning ALP for Service children and young people with ALN ...

⁷⁰ Page 193. The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

A maintained school, FEI or local authority when deciding upon preparing or reviewing an IDP32 for a Service child or young person must:

- (a) take into account any relevant issues arising from the nature of their parent's service (e.g. the effects of Service induced mobility),*
- (b) consider seeking advice from the CEAS, and*
- (c) use all available relevant evidence in respect of the child or young person, including any previous educational plans or other documents relating to the child or young person's needs, such as an EHC plan (in relation to England), a statement (in relation to Northern Ireland), **a Co-ordinated Support Plan (in relation to Scotland)** and the Service Children's Assessment of Need completed by MOD Schools.”⁷¹*

In its detailed treatment the Welsh code specifically seeks to address the matter of assessments for armed forces children that have been undertaken in another jurisdiction, including EHCPs in England and Co-ordinated Support Plans in Scotland.

Therefore, it will be seen that the amount of attention that is given to armed forces children within the various codes of practice varies across the UK jurisdictions. The treatments in England, Northern Ireland and Wales is much more detailed and specific than the approach found in Scotland. The general position in Scotland that the needs of this group of children and young people are met through the overall conditions of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act may be correct and educationally defensible as being consistent with an approach that emphasises inclusion. However, for armed forces parents, particularly those coming from elsewhere in the UK this lack of detail, and relative lack of consideration may be concerning, particularly when measured against the aspirations of Armed Forces Covenant. Secondly, England, Northern Ireland Wales could make the same claim as Scotland but they, unlike Scotland do specifically consider armed forces children, albeit in varying amounts of detail. The section on similarities between the systems in the UK provides sufficient evidence that those same values of inclusion operate outside Scotland, but the other jurisdictions are much more explicit in their consideration of the issue.

It is the case that there is no equivalent of the service pupil premium (SPP) in Scotland. This additional payment of £340 (in financial year 2024/2025) per armed forces child (including veterans who have left the service less than 6 years ago) is made directly to schools. In Wales there is a national officer and team of regional officers supporting the education of armed forces children. The combination of the lack of tangible support to the education of armed forces children relative to elsewhere in the UK combined with the light treatment in the national guidance, as expressed in the code of practice, will not naturally improve the confidence of parents.

The Welsh code and new draft code for Northern Ireland specifically identify mobility as being a central issue for some armed forces children in the context of providing additional support. All codes, however thinly, raise the matter of armed forces children having needs arising from their parents' employment. However, other than in the English code there is little consideration of the implications of mobility for assessing, planning and meeting children and young people's needs.

Implications

The variability of treatment of the needs of armed forces children across the UK points to a clear inconsistency in the way the needs of this group of children are being considered. This carries a clear implication for variability in provision.

This variability cannot be reassuring for families who are aware of it.

These concerns, based on this source of evidence will be most acute for families moving to Scotland.

Outward looking

The discussion in the previous section raises the question of how outward looking each jurisdiction is. An approach that, in its general provisions, recognises differences between the four jurisdictions and the implications for children and families would go some way to mitigating the effects of mobility. Clearly, this is an issue that affects a much wider group than armed forces children:

In all of the considerable detail contained in the individual codes nowhere is there any explanation of the similarities and differences between the systems in the four jurisdictions and their implications for learners. This whether considered from the point of view of children moving into an area or leaving it.

The English code mentions Scotland and Northern Ireland twice (along with Wales⁷²) in the context of EHCPs. It advocates transfer of the EHCP to Scotland but points out the receiving authority might disregard it.⁷³ The second reference is specifically in relation to armed forces children

“When considering provision for Service children with SEN or disabilities, use all relevant evidence, including statements made for Service children in Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as Co-ordinated Support Plans made for them in Scotland and the Service Children’s Assessment of Need (SCAN) completed for them by SCE.”⁷⁴

⁷² Wales is mentioned another 6 times mainly in the context of detained persons and youth justice.

⁷³ Section 9.165, Page 193, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁷⁴ Page 221, *ibid*

Scotland similarly describes what should happen when a child has a co-ordinated support plan and moves to England, Wales or Northern Ireland stating:

“The education authority which prepared the plan, can disclose the plan, or extracts from it, to the relevant authority for that area, where the original authority considers it necessary to do so, in the interests of the child or young person, to whom the plan relates.”⁷⁵

Beyond that most of the other 18 references are in the specific context of the technicalities of a placement of a Scottish pupil in a school in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland, or vice versa, either as an authority placement or the result of a placing request. Such a placement would represent a very specific set of circumstances both for an individual child and the necessary supporting arrangements. The Northern Ireland codes contain no references to the other UK jurisdictions. The Welsh code does contain 211 references to England the bulk of which deal with cases where English resident pupils are attending Welsh schools or Welsh pupils are being schooled in England. There is therefore extensive consideration of issues related to English EHCPs for the Welsh system. However, there is only one reference to Scotland and one to Northern Ireland respectively. These latter references are both specific to armed forces children and, as previously noted is about the use of EHCPs, statements and CSPs when producing an IDP as well as the SCAN document produced by Ministry of Defence schools.

With the exception of Welsh/English issues as viewed from Wales (but not England) there is therefore little evidence of consideration of inter-operability of support systems between the various UK jurisdictions. Given the general vulnerability of all children falling within scope of these documents whose learning needs are at risk as a direct consequence of mobility this feature is both surprising and disappointing. Where there are references to other jurisdictions this tends to be in the specific context of the various statutory plans that might be produced. However, not all children who merit support and who are the much bigger group will be eligible or be considered for a statutory plan. For example, in Scotland in 2020/21 32.3% of all pupils were categorised as having additional support needs but only 0.1% had a CSP in England 12.2% required support but only 3.7% had an EHCP. This suggests that substantial numbers of mobile children have no official recognition of the issues they may face and how professionals should support them, in otherwise very detailed documents. At this point, it should be noted, however, that in those authorities and schools with high expectations of professional practice there will be automatic attention to the needs of children, but this requires them to be alert to the issues.

This question of interoperability and whether there is a need for a better understanding of systems across the UK merits a review of those aspects that will be encountered by armed forces parents. The first, and obvious, issue is the nomenclature that such families will encounter.

⁷⁵ Page 91, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Differences in nomenclature

A comparison of some of the key terminology evident in the codes and which is used within the jurisdictions is presented in Table 10 below. From that table the challenge to parents moving between the UK nations, and particularly ones who already familiar with the terms and structures of one jurisdiction are obvious. Even at the most basic level there is no consensus on key terminology either for the general term that will be used for this area of provision or for the name of the statutory plans that rest at the apex of each of the four systems. This would be challenging enough in itself, but these specific terminologies have also developed their own sets of acronyms. These latter may be familiar enough to the professionals who work with them routinely but will not be helpful to parents with experience in a different lexicon. Obvious examples are the English provisions of the “local offer” and “personal budgets” which are not found in Scotland, or indeed anywhere else in the UK.

Table 10 also illustrates an important difference between the Scottish system and the rest of the UK. The Scottish code includes reference to a number of different types of plans that exist below the special statutory status of a CSP. In other words, children and young people who require additional support can reasonably expect some form of structured provision guided by national advice before the necessity of the bureaucratic process related to a statutory plan. This may come in the form of an individualised education programme (IEP) or personal education plan (PEP). Such an approach is consistent with an inclusive ethos and a commitment to early intervention. But such plans do not have a currency in other jurisdictions within the terms of the codes of practice.

There are even differences of nuance. For example, the English post of special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) implies a mainly administrative function – that of co-ordination. The Scottish role of “lead professional” carries a different connotation embodying the notion of leadership with its suggestion of accountability coupled to a professional responsibility. That latter concept suggests a more people centred than administrative approach. The two roles, in practice, may be similar but the connotations are completely different.

These differences and contrasts of which, it must be said, professionals may be unaware merit very careful explanation to parents who are new to an area. This is even before strictly local differences are encountered.

Table 10: Comparison of key terminology across the UK codes of practice

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
General terms applied to this area of provision	Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)	Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Additional Support for Learning (ASL)/Additional Support Needs (ASN)	Additional Learning Needs (ALN)
Statutory Plan	Education and Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	Statement of special educational needs (statement)	Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP)	Individual Development Plan (IDP)
Other plans for the child or young person	Care and Support Plan	Education Plan	Child's Plan Single Agency Plan Individualised Education Programme (IEP) Personal Learning Plan (PLP) Healthcare Plans	
Other important terms	Parent Carer Forums Local Offer Personal Budget	SEN register Note in lieu of a statement Special Educational Needs and Disability Order (SEND O) Dispute Avoidance and Resolution Service (DARS)		Additional Learning Provision (ALP) Case friend Independent Special Post-16 Institution (ISPI)
Key staff identified	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator	Named Board Officer DARS Officer (SENCO)	Lead Professional	Additional Learning Co-ordinator (ALNCo) Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DELCO) Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (ALNLO)

***Note:** In Wales there is the added complication arising from Welsh language requirement which introduces additional, but equivalent, terms and acronyms. Thus, the designated education clinical lead officer (DECLO) can become the swyddog arweiniol clinigol addysg dynodedig or SACDA.

Differences in the groups of children and young people entitled to support

An armed forces family moving into a new area and whose children have been experiencing difficulties in their learning will probably want to know about the entitlement to support. This will be particularly the case if support has been provided in the past, or they have been previously told that support might be beneficial.

The first criterion for entitlement is age. There is absolutely no doubt across all jurisdictions that all children of compulsory school age, that is for practical purposes those between the ages of 5 and 16 years, will be within scope. However, the English code is the only one that clearly defines which age group it applies to since this is stated in the title: **“Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years.”** The other codes each lack a single clear statement of age-related entitlement. All of the codes include provisions for children of preschool age. It is less clear, however where the lowest age threshold comes into operation since this may be determined by specific circumstances. For example, the Scottish code states:

“The authority may make provision for children under the age of 3 years with additional support needs, but are not age 2 years and over and looked after or disabled. However, they are not obliged to make such provision.”⁷⁶

For older age groups the information presented in the codes presents a differing picture across the UK. This is against a background where mainstream provision post-16 is itself diverse for example the sixth form colleges, 16-19 academies and independent specialist colleges found in England are not a feature of the Scottish education system. Both the Welsh and English codes have dedicated chapters on the roles and responsibilities of further education colleges thereby making arrangements for the 16+ age group explicit. Thus, the Welsh code states:

“Where it is brought to its attention, or otherwise appears to, an FEI that a young person at the FEI may have ALN, the FEI must decide whether the young person has ALN, unless any of the following circumstances apply...”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Page 41, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁷⁷ Page 154, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

The English code is also very clear on what should happen for this age group:

“FE colleges, sixth form colleges, 16–19 academies and independent specialist colleges approved under Section 41 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (the Act) have the following specific statutory duties:

- *The duty to co-operate with the local authority on arrangements for children and young people with SEN. This is a reciprocal duty. It means that, in carrying out their functions under this part of the Act, a local authority must co-operate with the named bodies who, in turn, must cooperate with the local authority.*
- *The duty to admit a young person if the institution is named in an Education Health and Care (EHC) plan...*
- *The duty to have regard to this Code of Practice.”⁷⁸*

In contrast, although the codes in Northern Ireland and Scotland do make reference to post-16 education and further education colleges, this is explained in the context of transition planning and the need for co-operation across agencies and the education sectors and appears as references within the document rather than as a self-contained description. For the reader, therefore, the impression is of two separate systems and sets of responsibilities in Northern Ireland and Scotland, rather than the single integrated educational support systems given by Wales and England.

Table 11: Comparison of definitions of children and young people entitled to support

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Entitlement to support	<i>“A child or young person has SEN if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her.”⁷⁹</i>	<i>“A child has special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made.”⁸⁰</i>	<i>“Applies to children or young people who, for whatever reason, require additional support, in the long or short term, in order to help them make the most of their school education and to be included fully in their learning.”⁸¹</i>	<i>“A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision.”⁸²</i>

⁷⁸ Page 112, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁷⁹ Pages 15–16, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁸⁰ Page 10, Section 1, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁸¹ Page 11, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁸² Page 21. The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

Assuming that a child or young person meets the age-related criterion for support, the next issue is whether they fall within the definition of need as laid down by the four jurisdictions. The basic definitions are set out in Table 11 above. In terms of clarification, it will be seen the definitions have a certain unhelpful tautological quality about them. Paraphrasing, children qualify for special or additional provision if they need special or additional provision. This is not helpful in gaining any insight into entitlement. The English, Northern Irish and Welsh definitions appear the most similar although the Welsh introduce the different term “additional learning needs”. The Scottish definition departs from this basic formula by introducing three concepts of duration (“long or short term”), the ability to “make the most of their education” and “to be included fully in their learning”. Although the basic tautology remains in the Scottish definition it therefore has a very different appearance to those found in the other three jurisdictions. This has a very important implication for children moving into, or out from Scotland which will be described in detail in later chapters.

All of the codes provide some further explanation of this basic terminology. These supplementary definitions for England, Northern Ireland and Wales appear very similar, as shown in Table 12 below. It is common to these three definitions that eligibility is described with reference to the child’s peer group: the “majority of the same age”. There is then a common reference to disability preventing use of facilities “generally provided for others”.

Table 12: Comparison of definition of learning disability for England, Northern Ireland and Wales

	A child has a learning difficulty if:
England	• <i>[they have] a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or</i> • <i>has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.</i>⁸³
Northern Ireland	(a) <i>they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age;</i> (b) <i>they have a disability which either prevents or hinders them making use of everyday educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in ordinary schools;</i>⁸⁴
Wales	a) <i>has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or</i> (b) <i>has a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities for education or training of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector.</i>⁸⁵

⁸³ Pages 15–16, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁸⁴ Page 10, Section 1, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁸⁵ Page 21, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

In Scotland, however, entitlement is expressed in different terms:

“A child or young person has additional support needs for the purposes of this Act where, for whatever reason, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person.”⁸⁶

“Additional support means– in relation to an eligible pre-school child, a child of school age or a young person receiving school education, provision (whether or not educational provision) which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children or, as the case may be, young persons of the same age in schools (other than special schools) under the management of the education authority responsible for the school education of the child or young person, or in the case where there is no such authority, the education authority for the area to which the child or young person belongs.”⁸⁷

Here the definition is not referenced in the first part at least, to other children. Instead, it is expressed in terms of the individual child themselves and an inability “to benefit from the school education provided or to be provided.” The necessity for additional support is then stated in the positive rather than the negative found in other UK jurisdictions being “*additional to or different from*”. In this sense, therefore the test of being hindered from “*making use of everyday educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children*” in these terms at least does not exist in Scotland. This is a different emphasis and is a written expression of difference between Scotland and the other UK education systems.

For armed forces families the possible effect of this is twofold. For a family arriving in Scotland, they should find their child’s needs being assessed taking account of them as an individual rather than their peers. This could result in a different outcome on any decisions about the need for support. For reasons that will become apparent in the discussion in chapter 7 there is a greater likelihood that some form of support will be thought to be appropriate. The second effect is a corollary of the first and is that a child moving from Scotland to anywhere else in the UK might find their needs assessed differently with a withdrawal of eligibility.

The Inter-operability of the statutory plans across jurisdictions

It has already been noted that sections 10.55 to 10.59 of the English code, in the specific context of armed forces children, makes explicit reference to using information from the statutory plans of the other UK jurisdictions. This immediately begs the question of how practical this is given the very different arrangements in each UK nation. The test of that is to review the interoperability of these statutory plans to see whether any challenges go beyond simple differences of nomenclature. Put simply could a parent moving across a national border and anticipate that their child’s existing plan will be used in their new home area? All else being equal that what appear, at first sight to be a reasonable expectation.

⁸⁶ Page 17, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

⁸⁷ Page 19, *ibid*

Reference should be made to Appendix 1 which summarises the content headings and format of the four different plans applicable across the UK. These are the main headings given in the national templates provided in the individual codes. In this part of the discussion the focus is on the structure and format provided by these templates. However, an important dimension of this issue is that the actual completion of these templates and their interpretation is in the hands of some 152 authorities in England, 1 in Northern Ireland, 32 in Scotland and 22 in Wales. Each of those authorities will have their own view of what should be included in the templates when completed for an individual child. The high failure rate of English local authorities with the Ombudsman and the SEND tribunal has already been highlighted, reflecting the often-poor quality of the actual content of these plans. Authorities will also therefore take a questioning view on the utility of information and plans supplied by any of the other 206 UK authorities. Such a view will also be extensively influenced by an authority's knowledge of its own schools, services and policies. This issue is exacerbated by even a cursory examination of Appendix 1 which shows these statutory plans differ significantly in structure, language and emphasis across the UK. Ironically, the one feature of these plans that is both common and clear is the identification of a school for the child or young person. Yet, this is also the one feature that is least likely to be continued by any new authority, for reasons of distance and cost but particularly if that authority has its own schools catering for children and young people in this category.

The point made in the previous paragraph notwithstanding it is the format of these plan templates that is the first obstacle to inter-operability. The number of sections of the plans differ: in England there are 11 sections (listed as A to K, with one section divided into two sub-sections); Northern Ireland statements have 7 numbered parts plus appendices; Scotland has 10 sections and Wales has only 3 sections but divided into 10 sub-sections. Where there is apparent commonality, the sequence of sections varies as shown in Appendix 1, reflecting differences in priority and emphasis. Superficially, some sections of these plans appear to deal with similar areas, for example: *"The views, interests and aspirations of the child and his or her parents or the young person."* (England); *"Profile: A summary that encapsulates the child or young person"* (Scotland); *"Section 1C: Profile (about me)"* (Wales). However, the differences in wording leaves the detail or content obscure and, notably, there is no equivalent section in the Northern Ireland statement. Similarly, at the more detailed level while England and Wales emphasise "outcomes", Scotland and Northern Ireland stress "objectives". Wales has explicit sections on "Transition" and "Travel Arrangements" but these do not appear elsewhere. Northern Ireland and Scotland include sections where arrangements for monitoring or review are to be made explicit, but England and Wales do not. There is a specific reference in the English EHCP format to personal budgets:

"Personal Budget: A Personal Budget is an amount of money identified by the local authority to deliver provision set out in an EHC plan where the parent or young person is involved in securing that provision. The funds can be held directly by the parent or young person, or may be held and managed on their behalf by the local authority, school, college or other organisation or individual and used to commission the support specified in the EHC plan."⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Page 284, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

The personal budget is unique to the English system and, if it has been agreed for a child this will be described in section J of the EHCP. As such it may form an integral part of the plan. It is not a feature however which can transfer to any other part of the UK. In this respect it is identical to any use made of the service pupil premium as envisaged elsewhere in the English code.⁸⁹ Therefore, the advice:

“When Personal Budgets are agreed with mobile Service parents, work with sending/ receiving local authorities and the parents concerned to ensure that adequate, appropriate and timely arrangements are made in the receiving authority to ensure continuity of those elements of the overall provision purchased for Service children with SEN by the Personal Budgets allocated.”⁹⁰

is of no assistance to any family moving between jurisdictions. Neither can personal budgets agreed in the UK be transferred to Service Children’s Education locations overseas.⁹¹

The description of multi-agency involvement with the child or young person is also unique to the context of each jurisdiction. Therefore, the English education and healthcare plan has explicit and separate sections for health input (section G) and social service (section H1 and H2). This contrasts to Northern Ireland where the template allows for “*non-educational needs*” and “*non-educational provision*”. The Welsh IDP has no such equivalently labelled section but does, in contrast at Section 2B, present a detailed layout describing specifically the type of provision, who is responsible for delivery, when it is to be delivered, the rationale and outcome. In Scotland there is a much broader reference to “*Factors giving rise to additional support needs based on a multi-agency assessment.*” This Scottish approach merits some further discussion. As implied by its title the Scottish Co-ordinated Support plan suggests the involvement of more than one agency, so this apparent lack of specificity is surprising. In fact, the criteria for eligibility for a CSP include:

“These additional support needs must also require the provision of significant additional support from an education authority, and
(a) the local authority exercising their functions other than education
(e.g. social work services) and/or
(b) one or more appropriate agency/agencies, within the meaning of the Act and the associated Regulations.”⁹²

⁸⁹ Page 220, *ibid*

⁹⁰ Page 221, *ibid*

⁹¹ Page 219, *ibid*

⁹² Page 71, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Therefore, by definition eligibility for a CSP requires not just involvement, but significant involvement of another agency. The expression of this is however much more integrated in the Scottish code than elsewhere. This partly explains why the Scottish system has spawned so many subsidiary plans described in Table 10. It is these plans that may be of much more relevance to other jurisdictions in making provision for the majority of armed forces children requiring support, rather than a CSP. To this degree the references to CSPs in the other jurisdiction's codes are misleading. In any event, the differing presentations of the roles of partner agencies represent very different approaches which will not be guaranteed to deliver information in a form that will be immediately usable or seen to be relevant across jurisdictions.

England and Northern Ireland require any information or advice obtained to be appended to the EHCP or statement. Wales requires at section 3A a list of such information, although not, apparently, the information itself. There is no equivalent reference in the Scottish template. The English code requires that when an authority is considering opening an EHCP for an armed forces child it must consult CEAS.⁹³ In Northern Ireland, the new draft code suggests but does not require consultation with CEAS: *"The Service Children's Education (SCE), Ministry of Defence, can be contacted by schools who are seeking advice with regard to children of service personnel."*⁹⁴ However, in both England and Northern Ireland, if such consultation does take place there is a requirement that the information should be attached in the appendices. In Wales, it is suggested that consideration should be given to consulting CEAS, but it is stated that that any previous plans, including those from other UK jurisdictions or the Service Children's Assessment of Need completed by MoD Schools must be used.⁹⁵ Unlike England and Northern Ireland such information is not required to be appended to the document⁹⁶, but would have to be referenced in section 3A of the IDP. In Scotland none of these requirements or expectations exist. Each of these different requirements will give the documents key characteristics reflecting different levels comprehensiveness and rigour which in turn will influence how professionals use them. For children experiencing multiple moves it will clearly be advantageous to incorporate previous plans into any current plan as better reflecting the full learner's journey of the child.

In fact, the Scottish template stands alone from the other three jurisdictions in the manner of its presentation. Its few and generalised headings, with relatively sparse guidance in the supporting notes, makes it a much more holistic and child-centred document than the other plans which are set out in a more bureaucratic format. This is consistent with the broader Scottish educational context of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and Curriculum for Excellence which is described in some detail in pages 27–38 of the Scottish code. The Scottish CSP template is the only one that includes a specific section for the child or young person's comments, again reflecting this holistic approach. Although, it must be noted that the guidance in the Welsh code states that *"The views, wishes and feelings of a child, their parent, or young person in relation to their ALN, ALP and education and training should also be discussed and recorded."*⁹⁷

⁹³ Page 220, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁹⁴ Section 10.30, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

⁹⁵ Page 200, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

⁹⁶ Page 250 of the Welsh code does allow such information to be appended, but it is optional.

⁹⁷ Page 255, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

This difference between a child-centred approach in Scotland and the administrative approaches elsewhere is fundamental. These are provisions which are supported by statute, conferring legal rights and responsibilities within each jurisdiction, which means that a document drafted in one nation cannot simply be re-labelled and adopted in a new jurisdiction without extensive review and, as necessary, re-assessment. Such re-assessment would, importantly, require to be done in the context of the new educational setting. Once a deeper understanding is gained of the differences in the pupil populations between jurisdictions who have a statutory plan (see chapter 6) this point assumes a new and much greater importance.

Implication

The difference in approach in Scotland to producing statutory plans raises fundamental issues which merit specific and detailed consideration for armed forces children who are mobile across boundaries.

Transitions

For most parents who have a child requiring support with their education one of the most important areas of concern is transition. This can be between the stages of education, for example from primary school to secondary school, but also from school-based education to the next stage in life. For armed forces personnel who are mobile this poses a challenge of how any period for planning their child's educational transition articulates with any geographical movements arising from their employment. The general issue of transition for armed forces personnel is recognised in the English code:

“Service induced mobility: Service personnel may relocate more often than the rest of the population and, sometimes, at short notice. Such transitions should be well managed to avoid Service children with SEN experiencing delays in having their needs assessed and met.”⁹⁸

Indeed, the English code devotes considerable attention to the whole issue of transition with clear responsibilities set out for early years⁹⁹ and school¹⁰⁰ settings. In the context of armed forces families, however, the English code envisages support for transition starting from Year 9 (age 13 to 14 years):

Local authorities can meet their statutory duties around transition assessment through an annual review of a young person's EHC plan that includes the above elements. Indeed, EHC plans must include provision to assist in preparing for adulthood from Year 9 (age 13 to 14):

⁹⁸ Page 219, , Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

⁹⁹ Page 88, *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ Page 102, *ibid*

“Support from Year 9 onwards (age 13-14) 8.7 High aspirations about employment, independent living and community participation should be developed through the curriculum and extra-curricular provision. Schools should seek partnerships with employment services, businesses, housing agencies.”¹⁰¹ Page 124

This expectation includes the consideration of post-16 options for individual children and points out that FE colleges and sixth form colleges can now recruit students directly from age 14.¹⁰² This augments the duties of maintained schools and pupil referral units have under section 42A of the Education Act 1997 to ensure pupils from Year 8 until Year 13 are provided with independent careers guidance. A similar duty applies to academies through their funding arrangements.¹⁰³ Young people with autism also have the right in England to a community care assessment and their parents of the right to a carer’s assessment which should be built into preparing for adulthood review meetings for those with EHC plans.¹⁰⁴ The local authority must make young people aware through their local offer of the support available to them in higher education and how to claim it, including the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).¹⁰⁵ Local authorities in England must set out in their Local Offer the support and provision that 19- to 25-year-olds with SEN can access regardless of whether they have an EHC plan.¹⁰⁶ There are also responsibilities for ensuring efficient transition for adult health care and adult social care.¹⁰⁷ There is therefore a wide range of provision built in to the English arrangements that start at an early part in a child’s educational career. Such provision however assumes a static population. Clearly any transition plan process that starts at age 13, or younger, stands to be significantly disrupted by a move to a new area or jurisdiction.

The Scottish code places a similar emphasis on transition to the English code, but its expression in practical terms is different. Although there are general references to long-term programmes, in terms of the individual learner’s journey, such as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) these are generally applicable and are not specific to pupils with additional support needs. Thus, references to moving from primary to secondary school suggest that planning should commence ***“no later than 12 months”*** before the expected transfer date. In relation to post school planning the suggestion is ***“it will often be better to start the transition planning much earlier than the latest timescale required by the Act, perhaps even in the early years of secondary school”***.¹⁰⁸ In relation to early years provision the equivalent suggested timescale is 6 months before a projected move.¹⁰⁹ The 12-month timeline does however harmonise with the required yearly interval for the review of individual co-ordinated support plans. It is suggested that all of the relevant information in the CSP should be incorporated into the transition process.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ Page 124, *ibid*

¹⁰² Page 128, *ibid*

¹⁰³ Page 130, *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ Pages 129-130, *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ Page 133, *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Page 135, *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ Page 136, *ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Page 96 and 107, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

¹⁰⁹ Page 97, *ibid*

¹¹⁰ Page 108, *ibid*

Importantly, the Scottish code does make specific provision for a move to a school in the area of another authority. Here the authority must transfer the CSP within 4 weeks of the date of transfer. It is then stated that:

“As soon as the plan is received, the new education authority must treat the plan as if they had prepared it and use it as the basis to provide for the child’s or young person’s additional support needs under the Act.”¹¹¹

There is also a requirement that the new authority is under a duty *“to seek and take account of information and advice from the education authority from which the co-ordinated support plan was transferred.”¹¹²* Once the CSP has been transferred the new authority has 12 weeks to review the plan. None of these requirements come into operation if a change of jurisdiction is involved. Rather the very open-ended, and caveated suggestion is made:

“When a child or young person who has had a co-ordinated support plan in Scotland subsequently moves to England, Wales or Northern Ireland, the education authority which prepared the plan, can disclose the plan, or extracts from it, to the relevant authority for that area, where the original authority considers it necessary to do so, in the interests of the child or young person, to whom the plan relates. Any disclosure must be in accordance with the law on data protection, human rights, confidentiality and any other relevant law.”¹¹³

In comparison to Scotland, Northern Ireland has a much more structured approach to the issue of transition. The new draft code requires that:

“The first transition plan is completed during the school year in which a child with a Statement attains age 14. The transition plan is completed in order to plan coherently for a child’s transition to adulthood.”¹¹⁴

There is therefore a requirement that a formal transitions plan is established for a child with a statement. The process for the production of this plan, including who should be involved is closely specified in the code. This plan is then subject to an annual cycle of review the importance of which, the draft Northern Ireland code notes, increases toward age 16. The importance of this process is underlined by the requirement that an education authority designated officer is responsible for considering and approving the first transition plan and subsequent plans,¹¹⁵ It is also required that an officer is designated to provide directions on the preparation of transition plan. It is further suggested:

¹¹¹ Page 90, *ibid.*

¹¹² Page 90, *ibid.*

¹¹³ Page 91 *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Section 8.1, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

¹¹⁵ Section 8.4, *ibid.*

“To provide for consistency in the delivery of these statutory requirements, the EA should, as a matter of good practice, provide a service to help plan for the transition of children with a Statement (an Education Transition Service). This service, as it relates to children with SEN, should be included within the EA’s plan of arrangements for special educational provision.”¹¹⁶

Consideration is also given to the cases where children have special educational needs but who do not have a statement. Where it is felt that such young people are likely to require some support as they progress to further education and training it is suggested that a transitions plan may be appropriate. This is not however mandatory.

Transition features as a specific section of the Welsh individual development plan and broad guidance on the content is provided.¹¹⁷ However, the detail provided by the Welsh code is much less specific than that found elsewhere in the UK. There is, for example no delineation of timescales or time intervals. This more holistic approach is explained as:

“Early and co-ordinated transition planning will support children and young people with ALN to make positive transitions. It is good practice to view transition planning as an ongoing process rather than a single event, and to tailor it to suit the child or young person’s individual needs.”¹¹⁸

Other references in the Welsh code suggest an individualised approach for each new setting and transition stage.¹¹⁹ The only guidance on timescales comes in relation to planning beyond the school years in which situation it is suggested that this ***“may need to start at least two years in advance of the transition.”^{120, 121}***

In this context it should be noted that a critical agent in ensuring smooth transition is the teacher. However, this is not a significant feature in formal teacher education. In Scotland, professional standards are governed by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The statements published by GTCS are written in terms which emphasise inclusion. They also specifically mention additional support needs, identifying particular conditions such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.^{122, 123} No mention is made, however, of the needs of mobile children, nor armed forces children. There is no requirement that teachers in Scotland should have any familiarity with any of the other UK education systems.

The approaches to managing transition therefore vary considerably across the UK. It would be easy to see how an armed forces family that is familiar with one system and the expectations it creates will be disconcerted by a move to a new set of arrangements.

¹¹⁶ Section 8.26, *ibid*

¹¹⁷ Page 206, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

¹¹⁸ Page 296, *ibid*

¹¹⁹ Page 297, *ibid*

¹²⁰ Page 298, *ibid*

¹²¹ Page 301, *ibid*

¹²² Page 6, Evaluation Framework: Accreditation of Programmes of Initial Teacher Education in Scotland August 2022

¹²³ Page 5, The Standard for Full Registration Mandatory Requirements for Registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland, General Teaching Council for Scotland Formal Enactment 2 August 2021

The long-term approach taken in England and Northern Ireland with entitlements set out in terms of specified ages contrasts with the Scottish and Welsh systems which at their most specific indicate a two-year planning period. It would also be easy to see that where a child has already committed, or been committed to a transition programme with a preferred destination will find it challenging to abandon that plan for an alternative. That alternative, and how it will be determined, may not even be clear to a family beyond a commitment to review whatever has already been established. An armed forces family who has a child aged 13/14 in England, or 14 in Northern Ireland would need to carefully consider the implications of any existing transitions plan before agreeing to a move under a new posting, particularly if that was in a new jurisdiction. A family in Scotland with a child who is within two years of moving from primary to secondary school, or who is within two years of leaving school will have a similar dilemma. For such families it may appear that the most appropriate way to manage this situation is to decline a posting or to opt for an unaccompanied posting with all of the unwelcome consequences for family life that will be entailed.

Resolving disagreements

From the foregoing discussion it would be easy to see how an armed forces family, particularly one with experience in more than one jurisdiction may wish to disagree with the plans or provision being made for their child based on their experience or knowledge of entitlements elsewhere. All four UK jurisdictions have established procedures for such an eventuality. These go beyond the basic remedies that may be available through complaints procedures or referral to an ombudsman. The stated preference across all jurisdictions, moreover, is that disagreements should not arise in the first place and that this will be achieved by the meaningful engagement of parents, children and young people.

This given the arrangements for resolving disagreements have very important differences across the UK some of which impinge directly on the rights of families. From the armed forces families' perspective some of these arrangements have implications for timescales, the significance of which will be discussed in the next section. In all cases these services must be provided free of charge, and authorities are required to make information freely and readily available.

In England local authorities must make disagreement resolution services available to cover all children and young people with special educational needs, not just those who are being assessed for or have an education and healthcare plan.¹²⁴ It represents the lowest or first level of the additional measures for resolving disagreements in special educational needs cases. A decision by parents and young people not to use disagreement resolution services has no effect on their right to appeal to the tribunal.¹²⁵

Mediation represents the next level for resolving disputes but it is only available following decisions by a local authority not to carry out an EHC needs assessment, not to draw up an EHC plan, after they receive a final EHC plan or amended plan, following a decision not to amend an EHC plan or a decision to cease to maintain an EHC plan.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Page 248, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

¹²⁵ Page 250, *ibid*

¹²⁶ Page 251, *ibid*

However, mediation has a formal status in the English system since an appeal to the tribunal is only admissible after the potential appellant has contacted an independent mediation adviser and secured a certificate that this step has taken place even if the parent or young person decides not to go to mediation. The tribunal will not accept an appeal without this certificate, or one that has been issued at the conclusion of mediation, unless their appeal relates to a restricted range of issues concerning the identification of a school in an EHCP.¹²⁷

A further complication is introduced by the right to mediation for the health and social care elements of an EHC plan. Unlike matters which can be appealed to the tribunal, parents and young people do not have to receive mediation advice before going to mediation. But if there is no resolution of the parent's or young person's disagreement with the health and/or social care elements of the plan then they cannot appeal to the tribunal.¹²⁸

The system for resolving disagreements as described in the new draft code for Northern Ireland is very similar to the system for England. The operant term in Northern Ireland is "dispute resolution" rather than "disagreement resolution". Mediation was introduced as a direct consequence of the Special educational Needs and Disability Act, 2016. Like England, before a case can progress for consideration by the tribunal a certificate is required from the independent mediation adviser.

The picture in Scotland is different. Like the rest of the UK the importance of securing agreement at the earliest stage is regarded as important. However, the mediation stage is the first rather than second of the formal stages in resolving disagreements. The Scottish code states "*Mediation can be used at any time in the life of a disagreement between an education authority and parents or a young person.*"¹²⁹ Parents or young people can elect to use mediation for issues that they may ultimately choose to refer to the tribunal, but this is not a requirement before such a referral. There is no requirement in Scotland for authorities to designate a mediation adviser and therefore no place for this role in the process. In these respects, the Scottish system is importantly different from England and Northern Ireland. It is a requirement, however, to commission and offer free mediation services.

Also, in contrast to England and Northern Ireland, dispute resolution represents the second rather than first stage of resolving disagreements. It is governed by the Additional Support for Learning Dispute Resolution (Scotland) Regulations 2005, and as such is a formal rather than informal process, it is not however mandatory. This procedure for resolving disputes allows for a formal review of an individual case by an independent third party, external to the local authority, who considers the circumstances leading to the disagreement, and makes a report.¹³⁰

The Additional Support for Learning Dispute Resolution (Scotland) Regulations 2005, prescribe which disputes, relating to particular functions of the authority under the Act, will be capable of reference to dispute resolution and timescales for the process.

¹²⁷ Page 254, *ibid*

¹²⁸ Pages 255–256, *ibid*

¹²⁹ Page 123, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

¹³⁰ Page 126, *ibid*

In the context of the Act, the procedure for resolving disputes allows for a formal review of an individual case by an independent third party, external to the local authority, who considers the circumstances leading to the disagreement, and makes a report. All requests for dispute resolution by parents or young people must be made to the Scottish Ministers who appoint an independent adjudicator. The process is required to be completed within 60 days, and the Scottish Ministers record the various stages of the process.¹³¹

The Welsh system is much more holistic, working under the general terminology of “disagreement resolution”. The Welsh code provides a general description of mechanisms to resolve disagreements including the use of independent “parties”.¹³² “Mediation” is not identified as a specific process or required step. Using disagreement resolution arrangements, or deciding not to use them, do not affect the rights to appeal to the tribunal.¹³³

As indicated above, for England and Northern Ireland the ability to take a case to mediation is linked to the procedures of the tribunal. Each jurisdiction has its own tribunal and its own set of regulations concerning which matters are competent for consideration by the tribunal. These are summarised at Appendix 2, which is laid out to allow comparison of terminology on similar issues. Examination of Appendix 2 shows that even where there are apparent similarities there are sufficient differences in wording to create doubt. For example, in England an appealable issue is *“a decision by a local authority not to carry out an EHC needs assessment or re-assessment”* while in Scotland the equivalent wording is *“a decision not to comply with a request to establish whether a child or young person has additional support needs requiring a co-ordinated support plan.”* There are, too, clear differences. For example, although in all cases an appeal is possible following a decision to cease or discontinue a plan, only in Scotland is it possible to appeal a decision to continue a plan following review. Similarly, Wales is unique in offering an appeal on the matter of:

“a decision by the local authority not to take over responsibility for an IDP, which is maintained by a school, where it is requested to do so by a child or their parent, a young person or the governing body of that school.”

Importantly, only in Scotland is it possible to challenge, in a tribunal, failures to meet the provisions set out in a plan, or where there have been lapses in timescales.

For armed forces parents and young people who are mobile between jurisdictions they will be confronted by a confusing set of rights to solve any disputes they have. Those moving to Scotland may be unaware of the existence of formalised dispute resolution procedure as an alternative to mediation. That same family be unaware of their right to go to mediation on matters unrelated to the specific matters to which they are constrained in England and Northern Ireland. The requirement in those two jurisdictions to consult a mediation adviser may come as surprise to someone moving from Wales or Scotland. Should families consider that their case needs to be considered by a tribunal then they could not automatically assume that a matter which is competent on one jurisdiction would be considered in another.

¹³¹ Pages 127–128, *ibid*

¹³² Page 338, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021

¹³³ Page 338, *ibid*

Implication

As described in the codes, these matters are complex. They also deal with issues which are at the end of a long and complex process of assessments, plans and meetings. This points to the need for detailed advice and support for armed forces families from the outset on the implications of the mechanisms for resolving disagreements, including the tribunals.

Timescales

For an armed forces families who are mobile with a short duration posting of 2-3 years in one place, the length of time it will take for their child's needs to be assessed, a plan (at whatever level) to be developed, and provision to be agreed and made will be important. All of the codes set out timescales for each stage of the process. These timescales, it must be emphasised, represent a notional position. In some cases, it will be possible for the entire process to be met well within the timescales set out in the code. It is, of course, also the case that making effective provision does not have to be preceded by all of the processes set out in a code. Regrettably, however, cases have been encountered where it has been argued that provision, including allocating a school place is contingent upon completion of the statutory processes. Equally, it is also possible that completion of the required stages in the process may take considerably longer than stated in any particular code. Table 13 shows that if the timescales outlined in the various UK codes are observed then the shortest time to reach a decision will be 20 weeks (England) but could be considerably longer. In Scotland that could be 32 weeks. If a parent or young person disagrees with the results of that process, or certain parts of it then it would be necessary for them to use one, or more, of the various mechanisms for resolving disagreements. This will add considerably to the timescale for a final decision. For example, in England based on the laid down timescales, this may add another 20 weeks. According to one source, in fact only 79% of cases were processed by the English SEND Tribunal within 22 weeks during in 2022 and that some were taking up to a year.¹³⁴ Similarly, in Northern Ireland, although the majority of decisions are reached within 14 weeks, it could take up to 45 weeks.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Schools Week, 25 February 2023,

¹³⁵ Page 39, A Reflective Analysis Of SENAC'S Tribunal Support And Representation Service And Parental Experiences Of Appealing To SENDIST, SENAC, November 2021

Table 13: Statutory time limits for processes associated with formal assessments and plans for school aged children across the UK jurisdictions

	Maximum time allowed in weeks (days) according to code in			
	England ¹³⁶	Northern Ireland ¹³⁷	Scotland ¹³⁸	Wales ¹³⁹
Response to request for assessment	6	4	8 or 16 during school holiday	12
Decision on whether a plan or statement is needed	2	8 or exceptionally 14		
Issue proposed plan or statement		4		
Issue final plan or statement		6	16	12
Total	16 (if “No”) 20 (If “Yes”)	22 to 34*	24 to 32*	22 to 34*
Additional time if there is a disagreement, if specified in the codes				
Mediation advice	(3) days	1	NA	NA
Dispute or disagreement resolution	8 ¹⁴⁰		60 days plus 10 days to indicate decision	
Mediation	8 ¹⁴¹	4.5 ¹⁴²	Not specified	
Tribunal	20 to hear case	Not specified ¹⁴³	Not specified in code	
	(10) days to notify decision	Not specified		
Minimum time, If no use of mediation	38 or 42			
Maximum time if mediation used	46 or 50			

* Annex 9 of the Northern Ireland code identifies 22 weeks as the lower total time limit and 34 weeks if all of the upper time limits which operate in exceptional circumstances apply.

¹³⁶ Page 154, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015

¹³⁷ Annex 9, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

¹³⁸ Page 76 and 79, , Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

¹³⁹ Pages 106–107, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021. The information here relates to children at maintained schools, chapter 15 dals with young people who are beyond school leaving age.

¹⁴⁰ Page 260 of the English code indicates that any appeal must be registered with the tribunal within 8 weeks of the authority decision.

¹⁴¹ See footnote above

¹⁴² Page 27, Section 12, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X

¹⁴³ Response to freedom of information request from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service Records and Information Management Team dated 23 September 2023.

Table 14: Time intervals at the Additional Support Needs Tribunal in Scotland

Year	Average Time to Process a case	Number of cases Processed
01/04/2018 – 31/03/2019	33.36 weeks	22
01/04/2019 – 31/03/2020	35.94 weeks	27
01/04/2020 – 31/03/2021	45.51 weeks	29
01/04/2021 – 31/03/2022	30.46 weeks	20
01/04/2022 – 31/03/2023	35.48 weeks	18

Source: Additional Support Needs Tribunal Service

Information supplied by the Additional Support Needs Tribunal in Scotland, in response to a Freedom of Information request is shown in Table 14. The shortest time to process a case was 75 days (11 weeks approximately) over the last 5 years and the longest time was 776 days (111 weeks). Use of the ASN Tribunal will therefore probably add a minimum of 11 weeks to the process, but this is much more likely to be over 30 weeks. In practice, therefore the entire process from asking for an assessment to resolution could take from 59 to 67 weeks, or well over a year.

Information supplied by the Education Tribunal for Wales indicates that for the target of 75% of appeals/claims being discharged within 20 weeks was achieved in 86% of cases. In other words only 64.5% (75% x 86%) of cases were processed within 20 weeks.¹⁴⁴

Implication

These timescales represent a substantial proportion of a two- to three-year military posting. They are such that they might well be dissuasive to an armed forces family contemplating a new posting. This will be the case either if they are content with the present provision being made for their child, or if they have been involved in a dispute with their current authority and have had to fight for that provision.

Summary

Having identified the similarities between the codes and their significance, in chapter 3, it is clear from this discussion that there are also significant areas of difference. For the armed forces family resident in Scotland or who is moving to or from Scotland, the most obvious difference will be the very limited recognition that is given to their situation north of the border relative to other jurisdictions. This may not be reassuring. Since these codes have the specific purpose of directing or guiding practice this also means that the professionals who are will be less aware, from this source at least of the implications of a child's armed forces status.

Those families who have gained experience of another education system in the UK will encounter significant differences as they move about the UK, with particularly marked differences in Scotland. As the discussion in this chapter has highlighted, at one level, these differences may be regarded as simply being issues of terminology or details of procedure. If this were true then matters such as the transferability of records or the exchange of information would make any move relatively straightforward. There would, for example, be no operational necessity to have to restart the assessment of a child from scratch, as is indeed suggested by the codes. This discussion has shown, however, that such a view would be fundamentally mistaken. In fact the differences between the jurisdictions are so deep and operate across such a range of processes that to simply take at face value any information produced in another education system would be hazardous.

It is, of course, true that any information related to a child's learning has the potential to be useful. Any decisions that took no account of prior learning would be inconsistent to that fundamental principle of progression which guides educational practice at both individual and whole-system levels.

However, to make use of any such information requires an understanding of the context in which that information has been created. It is tentatively suggested here that very few professionals have the in-depth knowledge of educational support across UK jurisdictions that allows that reliable interpretation of any information that comes with the child or young person. The very high failure rate for authorities of cases coming before the English SEND Tribunal highlighted elsewhere in this report might even suggest that professionals within a jurisdiction only have a limited understanding of their own procedures and terminology.

The further implication of these observations is that many of the issues arising from either a child moving to or from Scotland might be mitigated through authoritative advice being available to parents or the young people themselves. Such advice would require a knowledge of the systems for making provision for children requiring support across the UK. However, it would also require a knowledge of the specific implications for armed forces families in this context. The time taken to complete assessments and produce statutory plans as compared to the duration of posting is one obvious example. However, understanding is also required of other issues such as the unique nature of family life; the pressure brought from operational deployments or training commitments; the implications of multiple moves of school for peer and adult relationships as well as continuity of learning; and the implications of unaccompanied postings.

It is therefore suggested that this is a much more complex, nuanced and multi-variate issue than is first apparent even when considered at the level of policy and the high intentions reflected in the various national codes of practice.



Chapter 5:

Advice Services

“As a military doctor, I don’t know all of the services available to Armed Forces personnel.” (Major, Royal Army Medical Corps)

Reference has already been made to the availability of advice services in the context of the national codes of practice. The need for advice to be available to parents and young people is recognised universally.

Parental advice guides

Given the complexity of this area of provision and, as already established, the impenetrability of the various pieces of statutory guidance, each jurisdiction has produced special guidance intended for parents. An overview of the guides is provided in table 15, below.

Table 15: Summary of parental guides produced by the devolved administrations

	Number of pages	Date of Issue	Referrals to code
England	58	2014	17
Northern Ireland	39	1997	0
Scotland	105	2022	5
Wales move	7	2022	2

As Table 15 shows these guides are themselves substantial documents, with the Scottish version running to 105 pages. It is also the case that the English and Northern Irish codes are old¹⁴⁵, dating from 2014 and 1997 respectively and are therefore unable to reflect recent practice, nor adjustment for emerging issues. A family moving from Scotland to Northern Ireland will therefore find multiple references directing them to “Education and Library Boards” which disappeared in 2015, while no account is taken even of the code issued in 2005. At the time of writing, the Welsh document was mainly focused on transition arrangements from the old (SEN) arrangements to the new (ALN) system, although an update web page on the overall position was anticipated.

Table 16, on the following page, replicates the methodology used earlier in Tables 6 and 7 to analyse the readability of the parental guides. This shows that while they are easier to read than the codes of practice themselves, they are still rated as “fairly difficult to read” or, in Scotland’s case “difficult to read” and is held to need 13.5 years of schooling.

¹⁴⁵ The Northern Ireland Education Authority has produced parental guidance on the web. Which was last updated on 27 July 2024. The Northern Ireland Government web-site, however, retains the links to the 1997 guidance.

Table 16: Readability of the parental guides produced by the UK nations

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Words per sentence	21	20.3	26.2	28.7
Average syllables per word	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5
Flesch Reading Ease	50.2	59.3	44.9	50.8
Interpretation of reading ease based on Flesch Reading Ease Chart	Fairly difficult to read	Fairly difficult to read	Fairly difficult to read	Fairly difficult to read
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	11.5	10	13.5	13.3

Beyond the variable quality of the parental guides an armed forces family will find little reference to their situation. The English guide is unique in mentioning the armed forces:

“There are some groups of children and young people with SEN whose specific circumstances mean they need something more than or different from other children with SEN. These groups include: ... children whose parents are in the armed forces The arrangements and entitlements for these children will vary. Further information If any of the circumstances above apply to your child, you can find out more by looking at Chapter 10 of the 0-25 SEND Code of Practice.”¹⁴⁶

Throughout the four guides, however, there is absolutely no reference to the differences in definition, policy and practice across the UK. There is therefore no advice given for the situation of when a child crosses a national border and its potential significance. Thus, for example, other than in their own national guides there is no mention of EHCPs, CSPs, PDPs or statements. The Northern Ireland guide does give advice on what should happen when there is movement between Education and Library Board areas, which is ironic given that there is now only one single education authority and so any problem should not arise. In Scotland, there is reference to moves between local authority areas.¹⁴⁷

The parental guides therefore do not serve armed forces or any mobile families well. Such families would therefore have to fall back on the original codes, or seek specialist advice.

Advice services

Up to this point the discussion has highlighted the complexities of both policy and practice for armed forces families moving across jurisdiction boundaries. The previous section identifies that the general parental advice guides do not address the situation of mobile or armed forces families. This therefore creates the immediate issue of the wider support and advice that is available to families, particularly those who are moving between jurisdictions and who require information relevant to transition from one setting to another. Here one important dimension is for families to be able to understand how the effect on their children of moving from one learning context to another.

¹⁴⁶ The Page 40, Special educational needs and disability A guide for parents and carers August 2014, Department for Education 2014

¹⁴⁷ Page 57, *ibid*

England

The availability of general advice to all families in England is grouped under the title “Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Services” (SENDIASS). This requirement to have independent advice and support is described in the English code of practice. An overview of SENDIASS is given on the Council for Disabled Children web site <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk>. However, there is no single, central service instead this is organised regionally with a service linked to a particular town or city or county. The result, as Table 17 shows, is some 153 different local sources of advice.

Table 17: SENDIASS advice in England

Region	Number of different organisations	Web-site Available	Web-site Unavailable on 09 April 2024NA
East Midlands	10	9	1
East of England	11	10	1
London	33	23	10
North East	12	8	4
North West	24	18	6
South East	19	17	2
West Midlands	14	13	1
Yorkshire and The Humber	15	13	2
South West	15	12	3
Total	153	123	30

Notably, on the day of the survey the websites of these providers 30, or 19.6%, were unavailable or blocked. The providers ranged from the councils themselves, through special-to-purpose or arms’ length organisations to independent providers such as Barnardo’s. All are bound, however, by the same requirement to be independent. It is unsurprising given the number and diversity of these sites that both their accessibility and the quality of content is extremely variable. Some are very well presented, well-structured and engaging while others are much more opaque. The Council for Disabled Children supplements its list of SENDIAS services with a direction to advice services “outside of England” – SENAC (Northern Ireland), Enquire (Scotland) and SNAP Cymru (Wales) but no specific advice is given about either transition or the issues that families might have to consider.

In order to gain a better insight into the advice that might be offered a sample of 13 SENDIAS services were identified in those areas of England where there is known to be a significant Armed Forces presence or tradition. One of these was blocked as a “dangerous web page”, and of the remaining twelve, 9 had no mention of any issue related to movement and similarly no mention of the significance of other jurisdictions. One site, Norfolk, did have a helpful page “Moving to Norfolk” but this had no information related to movement from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Telford and Wrekin included information on transition, but not transfer from one area to another, but there was a helpful checklist for parents on what to look for during a visit to a prospective new school. Plymouth would only accept enquiries from within its own post code areas. Sites frequently referred to the pressure of enquiries they faced and therefore the delay in responding to enquiries as illustrated:

“A Database and Advise (sic) Line Officer will take your calls between 9am and 5pm and respond to any emails with (sic) 24 hours. You will then be allocated to an Advisor who will make initial contact within 5 days to arrange an appointment. Appointments will be within 2 weeks (please note these timescales are maximum and most cases will be dealt with sooner.”¹⁴⁸

An armed forces family facing an imminent move might therefore not expect an immediate response to a request for advice. Only one site visited, North Yorkshire, had specific information for armed forces families and Catterick Garrison, with a range of resources and specific information on a move between areas, although this did not mention other jurisdictions. North Yorkshire SENDIASS also has 2 dedicated co-ordinators for armed forces families.

More generally, the Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) of the Ministry of Defence has produced a booklet on moving schools which includes a specific section on additional support needs. This includes advice before a move to collect all possible information on support being provided to a child:

“If your child has at any time attended an MOD School or setting, you may have documentation relating to their support in school. This could be a Record of Intervention, Assessment and Intervention of Special Educational Needs (RIASEN) or a Service Children’s Assessment of Need (SCAN). Local Authorities must have regard to these documents, in England.”¹⁴⁹

This section, however, makes no reference to the different systems of support throughout the UK although enigmatically there is a reference to “an Education, Health and Care Plan or another coordinated support plan” without any indication that the latter has specific significance to Scotland. This booklet does advise parents to make early contact with CEAS where it is known that high quality advice is available which includes in-depth understanding of the various UK support systems. The CEAS publication signposts the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) which produces a wide range of resources, but these are focused on SEND and relate to transition (movement between educational stages) rather than movement between schools or education systems.

Information provided by the Independent Provider of Special Education Advice (IPSEA) gave an interesting insight into the issues. IPSEA confirmed they provide advice about the English statutory framework but signpost to other services and resources within Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland if they receive queries from parents about moving into those systems.

¹⁴⁸ Cambridgeshire SENDIASS web site. <https://send.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>

¹⁴⁹ Page 6. “Moving Schools – a Parents’ Guide”, Ministry of Defence, undated

In doing so they recognised that the systems in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are “very different”. IPSEA do give training to their volunteers specifically on the situation of armed forces families and provided a detailed information pack which deals with many of the major issues. IPSEA recognises:

“The identification of educational needs doesn’t automatically passport into another jurisdiction – at best, the new jurisdiction will use the knowledge gathered from the statutory processes in the previous jurisdiction to define and meet needs in its jurisdiction. At worst, it could be ignored (or not meet statutory thresholds for support or the same kind of support) and a child starts again from scratch in the new place even though their needs haven’t changed at all! (sic) In many cases, all parents have is information about the statutory framework they are moving into (which is helpful) and the (non-binding) Armed Forces Covenant to refer to as they start trying to get help into place.”¹⁵¹

Insightfully, IPSEA also observed that *“In addition, legally, any obligation to help only starts when the child is in the jurisdiction.”¹⁵²* This, statement of a position highlights the paradox for parents when one of the key tenets of provision for children requiring additional support is planning, which is a process, by definition that takes place in advance. Notwithstanding that the legal obligation is no impediment to actually providing information and advice to non-residents this reveals a serious flaw in the existing systems as it underpins the position already identified where a SENDIAS service will not entertain enquiries from outside its area.

Against this background in 2024 the Ministry of Defence has published specific advice on EHCPs in the case of mobility.¹⁵³ This document is explicit in only applying to England, and in that it only relates to those children and young people with an EHCP who constitute a minority even of the SEND population. This document points out that an English local authority has the power (but not a duty) to maintain an EHCP when a child moves away, including to a location outside England. One factor that may lead an authority to maintain a plan in these circumstances is the amount of time the child or young person will be away and if they are expected to return. If the decision is to maintain the plan, then the authority would have a statutory duty to review it every 12 months. This guidance also states:

“Where the local authority has maintained an EHC plan for a child or young person who moved outside of England, they may wish to consider when to review the EHC plan once they become aware that a child or young person is due to return to England.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *ibid*

¹⁵² *ibid*

¹⁵⁴ “Guidance for local authorities on the treatment of education, health and care plans when a child or young person moves out of or into their area”, Ministry of Defence, February 2024

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*

It is therefore possible for an armed forces family to seek to safeguard the continuity of child's education upon moving to Scotland by securing the continued commitment of an English authority to an EHCP. The guidance also makes provision for a child moving back to England:

“Where the local authority has maintained an EHC plan for a child or young person who moved outside of England, they may wish to consider when to review the an EHC plan once they become aware that a child or young person is due to return to England.

Where the local authority has ceased to maintain an EHC plan and the child or young person returns to England, they can place the child or young person in a special school or special post-16 institution without an EHC plan in specified circumstances, including where the parents and certain other interested parties all agree.”¹⁵⁵

It is therefore possible, if this guidance is followed for a child to move to Scotland and then to return to England without an apparent disruption to the SEND processes, provided they have an EHCP. This makes no presumption of what happens when they are in Scotland, nor what happens if they are assessed as having additional support needs during that phase of their schooling. Equally, this provision does not include advice on what should happen for children assessed as being within SEND, but who do not have an EHCP.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland advice is provided by a charity, the Special Educational Needs Advice Centre (SENAC). The information provided on SENAC's web site states:

“We work to protect children and young people's rights and entitlements under the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system. We aim to ensure that decisions are based in the best interests of the child.”

SENAC has confirmed however that their interpretation of that responsibility is solely restricted to advice on the education system in Northern Ireland. In their words:

“Our advisers would be aware that there are differences in each region, therefore they would refer parents to organisations who can offer specialist expertise in the area they are moving to. It is not SENAC's remit to advise on another area's legislation or practices. Likewise, we would expect other jurisdictions to refer parents to SENAC if they wanted information on the NI SEN system.

This would ensure that parents get the best advice possible from local advisers who know the system intimately. Our advisers would only require the information necessary for signposting parents... the resources we hold would refer specifically to the Northern Ireland SEN System.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ ibid

¹⁵⁶ Email from SENAC, dated 03 April 2024

Scotland

The Scottish Government have produced a specific booklet for armed forces families moving to Scotland. This includes what is, of necessity, a very brief statement on additional support needs which points out that arrangements are different in Scotland to the rest of the UK.¹⁵⁷ But, beyond signposting to other sources of information and advice this provides little detail. Rather it is left to the main source of advice on additional support needs in Scotland which is provided by Children in Scotland under its “Enquire” service. The Enquire web-site does provide helpful information specifically for families moving to Scotland under the headings:

- *“What does the law say about children who need extra support at school in Scotland?”*
- *What support will my child get?*
- *How can I arrange the right school placement for my child?*
- *We’re moving from England – what will happen with my child’s EHCP?*
- *We’re thinking of moving, what should we do next?*
- *We have already moved to Scotland but are unsure what to do next.*
- *Where can I find out more about the education system in Scotland?”*¹⁵⁸

The information given under each of these headings tends to be a factual description of provision, or at least of the statutory requirements. It complements a helpful list of ASN resources available throughout Scotland which amounts to a “map” of specialist provision. There are also some references to issues which may be helpful to parents seeking information on continuity of provision. For example, it is pointed out that a child’s previous attendance at a special school does not mean they will be allocated a place in a special school or unit upon moving to Scotland. It does however clarify that authorities “should” take account of any information about previous support. Perhaps the most helpful statement is: *“If you feel your child may meet the criteria for a CSP, this is something you can discuss with the school or local authority when you are planning your move to Scotland.”* It adds that: *“You can find out more about other types of support plans used in Scottish schools in our ‘Planning your Child’s Support’ factsheet.”* Having reviewed all of the equivalent websites across the UK, this clear statement on the lack of equivalence of EHCPs is unique in both its existence and clarity and demonstrates at least some awareness of provision elsewhere. The advice that parents should contact their catchment area school to *“discuss how they can meet your child’s needs”* is sound.

Enquire do monitor and collect data on the information requests they receive. They do not, however, record whether these come from either mobile or armed forces families. In lieu this is captured under the heading “interrupted learners”, a category which would also potentially include children suffering, for example, from ill health, bereavement or a carer role. In 2023–2024 some 81 enquiries out of 1585 (5%) related to interrupted learners.

¹⁵⁷ Page 14, “Welcome to Scotland A guide for Service personnel and their families in Scotland (updated 2024),” Scottish Government, March 2024

¹⁵⁸ There is also specific reference to refugees.

The “Top 5” issues raised within this category were:

- communication from professionals 46% (27);
- school-related anxiety 36% (29);
- out of school education provision 35% (28);
- lack of understanding of ASN 28% (23); and
- learning environment 25% (20).

Note: multiple issues and factors are often raised in one enquiry

Additionally, 2% (32) of enquiries related to movement to Scotland and 0.7% (11) were specifically about cross-border issues.¹⁵⁹

This information supplied by Enquire tends to confirm what has hitherto been inferred from policy documents, although it must be noted that this is not specific to armed forces families. There are issues for families directly related to movement to Scotland, albeit in small numbers. Within the category of interrupted learners, a more significant number relate to the lack of understanding of ASN, which was highlighted as an issue in earlier chapters. All of this given, “interrupted learning” is only one condition which may relate to armed forces children as being specific to their situation. Conceivably, other recognised conditions such as bereavement or mental health issues may also be relevant but are presently much less identifiable.

Enquire is not the sole source of authoritative information in Scotland. A website, Forces Children’s Education (forceschildrenseducation.org.uk) has been developed under the aegis of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). It is administered by the ADES national transitions and education officer whose post is supported by an element of funding from the Scottish Government. The comprehensive range of resources available on the site include a booklet *“Understanding the Scottish Education System An Overview for Armed Forces Families, Updated 2021”*. This booklet includes a section on additional support needs and signposts to the Enquire web-site for additional information, including the resources discussed above. There is also a guide, primarily aimed at professionals, which includes advice on managing transitions: *“Armed Forces Families in Scotland: Toolkit for Teachers”*. Taken together the Forces Children’s Education website offers a rich, current and authoritative picture of Scottish Education and firmly sets additional support needs in that context. It does make reference to the other education systems in the United Kingdom and aspects of the provision. How aspects of transition related to mobility might be managed is also specifically emphasised. There is no single consolidated statement, however, which explains how the other UK systems relate to the Scottish system and what the implications might be for a child moving from one to the other in terms of continuity of provision.

Notably, the Forces Children’s Education website does contain a significant amount of material that relates to the educational implications of military service, as distinct from mobility. There is therefore material on war and conflict studies.

¹⁵⁹ Information supplied by Enquire by email, dated 06 May 2024.

So far as the overall support to parents in Scotland is concerned the position has been well summarised by Jenny Gilruth MSP, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills:

“... the landscape is quite cluttered as far as the support available to parents is concerned, and one of the actions in the action plan is to simplify that. After all, there is a range of support available... and we need to pull all of that together and signpost parents to ensure that they get the support that they need and to prevent escalation, ...Right now, parents and young people can receive support in a variety of ways, and the situation is not always clear.”¹⁶⁰

The cabinet secretary was speaking in the context of the resident population of Scotland the vast majority of whom will have grown up in and beside the education system. Most of them will have been pupils in Scottish schools. It might reasonably be assumed that they therefore have at least a basic familiarity with the Scottish curriculum, educational vocabulary and structure of provision, and its values. If the cabinet secretary, who was herself a teacher, believes there is a lack of clarity for this population, then the problem must be correspondingly bigger and more acute for a mobile population who lack these advantages of familiarity.

Wales

The Northern Ireland position is somewhat echoed in Wales. General advice on matters related to additional learning needs is provided by the charity SNAP Cymru. The SNAP website explains:

“We give advice and support on a range of issues including assessments, individual education plans, statements of special educational needs (sic), bullying, school attendance, exclusion, health and social care provision and discrimination.”

While there is no explicit resource or information on the SNAP website related to movement between jurisdictions or with specific reference to armed forces children. SNAP have provided a clarification of the service they offer, which would be helpful to families moving from Scotland to Wales or vice versa:

“While our remit and direct support to families is for those who reside in Wales.... Our freephone helpline receives dozens of calls a day and we do speak to families who may be moving or planning on moving across borders (sic). In those incidents (sic) we always do our best to advise them as appropriate at that point about the legislation and expectations and signpost them to other areas where they may well be able to get support. Families moving to Wales would most often be made aware that when they have completed the move, they can seek more direct support from us if that is required. For a parent who may be moving out of Wales then we would do our best to advice and signpost them to the most appropriate agencies in their area.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Jenny Gilruth MSP, Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee, 20 March 2024

¹⁶¹ Email 27, March 2024

Wales does however have the benefit of a specialist team of officers supporting the education of armed forces children working as Supporting Service Children in Education (SSCE) Cymru funded by the Welsh government since 2019. SSCE's website contains a range of information that will be useful to mobile families. This includes important overview summaries of the main differences between overall education systems across the UK and a table of terminology comparisons in the area of additional educational support. This latter table also includes Ministry of Defence Schools. Most helpfully it identifies "Who should I turn to?" for each jurisdiction. There is, however, no specific advice on the implications of movement between jurisdictions.¹⁶² It does however make a very interesting observation quoting research published in 2018:

*"[T] the percentage of Service children (6.1%) being supported at School Action level is considerably lower than the percentage of all pupils (11.17) from across our sample [...]the differential of five percentage points is interesting in that it would appear to support comments received during the qualitative phase of research, where parents, practitioners and stakeholders expressed the view that the Additional Learning Needs of Service children with lower levels of need are more likely to go unidentified and unsupported. One explanation for this may be that the transient nature of this population may make it less likely for any differentiated learning approaches to be evaluated and, in turn, progressed onto support through School Action."*¹⁶³

Ministry of Defence

The MOD, in early 2025, established a new resource in the form of a website discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk. This includes information on education and childcare and additional needs and disability. Contributions have come from Scotland, and Northern Ireland as well as England. As such it does form an important new resource where much of the information is in one place. Like much other information, however, it deals with each of the jurisdictions separately rather than addressing the issue of mobility as a specific topic. Issues specific to the relationships between the various educational support systems in the UK are not obvious.

Summary

The chapter on codes of practice established firmly that the various systems of educational support across the UK have diverged from one another, each having its own distinctive systems and vocabulary. It has further been established that the populations of children served by these systems differ between jurisdictions. It is not surprising, therefore, that the advice services that are supposed to support families also differ from one another and that the information they make available is distinctive to the system they support. What is surprising, and disappointing, is the level of insularity that has also developed to the level that, in some parts of the UK advice will only be given once local residence has been established.

¹⁶² Page 64, SSCE Cymru Service Family Guide

¹⁶³ Page 20, Llewellyn M., Duggan B., Graham S., and McDonald M., "Research on Experiences of Service Families with Children with Additional Learning Needs in Education in Wales, Final Report", for SSCE Cymru Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales and Arad Research, May 2018

It is true that Scotland does recognise the distinctive nature of its own system and therefore has produced information for families who are coming into the nation. That information, particularly through its specific recognition of education and healthcare plans does demonstrate some awareness of at least one aspect of the English system. Guidance for mobile children, crossing national and local boundaries, is largely restricted to the truism that the receiving school or authority may take account of any information the family takes with them.

There are particular gaps in information and advice for:

- children and young people who have support needs, but who are not subject to a statutory plan;
- families who are moving out of Scotland to the rest of the UK; and
- how progression and continuity of learning can best be maintained.

Mobile families as a group are not recognised and therefore the advice directly related to their needs is limited. This is all against a general background where a recognition of the deficiencies of advice and support for parents have been acknowledged at the highest level by a cabinet secretary.

Implications

A static armed forces family settled in a posting, or a veteran's family that is established in an area, will face a similar situation obtaining advice and information to the rest of the population. For these two groups the specific challenge will be in relation to those additional support needs which arise or have arisen directly from military service, for example family separation or operational deployment. In Scotland, these matters should be capable of being addressed within the information and advice available as part of general additional support needs provision since child well-being lies at the core of provision.

The issue is different for mobile armed forces families. Such families will face a discontinuity of information which is actually built-in to the systems. The availability of advice is heavily reliant on the family actually being resident in an area as a precondition. In this situation pre-planning, which is fundamental to effective progression and educational provision and is enshrined in legal structures across jurisdictions for in-situ families, cannot be realised.

While there is abundant signposting to other sources of information, these amount to a "fresh start" and the issue of continuity is not considered. Only in Scotland is there some consideration of this issue for children entering Scotland, but much more could, and should, be done. There needs to be particular consideration of mobile and armed forces children:

- Moving into and out from Scotland
- Who have additional support needs, but who do not meet the criteria for a statutory plan
- Ensuring a continuity of experience



Chapter 6:

Policy Into Practice

An armed forces family moving to Scotland may be interested to know which potential areas of need are formally recognised by the education system as a whole. This is not a straightforward issue. Table 18 presents the conditions upon which the four UK jurisdictions collect and publish data. The categories in the table have been arranged so that similar areas of need are grouped together to allow easier comparison across the four UK nations, this is not the order used in official publications. The precise wording in those publications has, however, been preserved. In some cases, the comparison is easy, thus “Autistic spectrum disorder” is the term used in Scotland as it is in Wales and England. Northern Ireland uses the marginally different term “autism”. However, in some areas, the differences in terminology, although similar are enough to create doubt. An example of this latter case is that Scotland alone identifies a specific category of “communication support needs” whereas in England and Wales this area of need is conflated with “speech and language needs” and is not mentioned in Northern Ireland specifically at all.

A number of areas of need are identified in Scotland that appear to have no direct equivalent elsewhere. These include risk of exclusion, interrupted learning, English as an additional language¹⁶⁴, looked after¹⁶⁵, more able pupil, young carer, bereavement, substance abuse and the nebulously stated “family issues”. Conversely, Northern Ireland in particular identifies a number of areas of need apparently not specified in Scotland including: Asperger’s, attention deficit disorder, epilepsy, asthma, diabetes, anaphylaxis, muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome (sic), other medical condition/syndrome, interaction of complex medical needs, and “other”. Given the inclusive nature of the Scottish system, and the high levels of ASN identification, it is highly unlikely that children with any of the conditions specified elsewhere in the UK will not have their needs addressed in Scotland. The issue here is the discontinuity across jurisdiction boundaries and that a family which has fought for a particular label for their child, may find that any perceived traction associated with that label evaporates when they move.

The code of practice on additional support for learning in Scotland seeks to clarify the concept of additional support for learning by listing a range of conditions or situations which may give rise to, or be associated with, needs. These are summarised in Table 18. The Scottish Government do emphasise that this list is not exhaustive.¹⁶⁶ The independent review of additional support for learning published in 2021 drew specific attention to this list and observed:

“The supporting guidance unhelpfully complicates people’s understanding of what an additional support need may be by listing a selection of conditions, which may require additional support.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ This category may be important for individuals from abroad serving with the UK Armed Forces in the UK.

¹⁶⁵ In Scotland, a “looked after child” is one on the care of their local authority as a result of a compulsory supervision order made by the children’s hearing system

¹⁶⁶ Paragraph 3, page 11, Supporting Children’s Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

¹⁶⁷ Page 7, “Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential” (“the Morgan Review”), Scottish Government, June 2020

Table 18: Comparison of conditions recognised as giving rise to a need for additional educational support across the United Kingdom

England ¹⁶⁸	Northern Ireland ¹⁶⁹	Scotland ¹⁷⁰	Wales ¹⁷¹
		Are children of parents in the Armed Forces	
Autistic spectrum disorder	Autism	Autistic spectrum disorder	Autistic spectrum disorder
	Asperger's		
Speech, language and communication needs	Speech and language difficulties	Language or speech disorder	Speech, language and communication difficulties
		Communication support needs	
Social, emotional and mental health	Social emotional and behavioural difficulties	Social emotional and behavioural difficulty	Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties
	Attention deficit disorder		
	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder		Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
		Risk of exclusion	
	Mental health issues	Mental health problem	
Moderate learning difficulty	Mild learning difficulties	Learning disability	Moderate learning difficulties
		Other moderate learning difficulty	
Severe learning difficulty	Severe learning difficulties		Severe learning difficulties
Specific learning difficulty	Dyslexia	Dyslexia	Dyslexia
	Dyscalculia	Other specific learning disability e.g. numeric	Dyspraxia
	Dyscalculia		Dyspraxia
Physical disability	Cerebral palsy	Physical or motor impairment	Physical and medical difficulties
	Spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus		
	Muscular dystrophy		

Continued on the following page

¹⁶⁸ Special educational needs in England, Academic year 2022/23 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

¹⁶⁹ Source: Page 40 "Special Educational Needs", Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Northern Ireland Audit Office, 17 June 2017

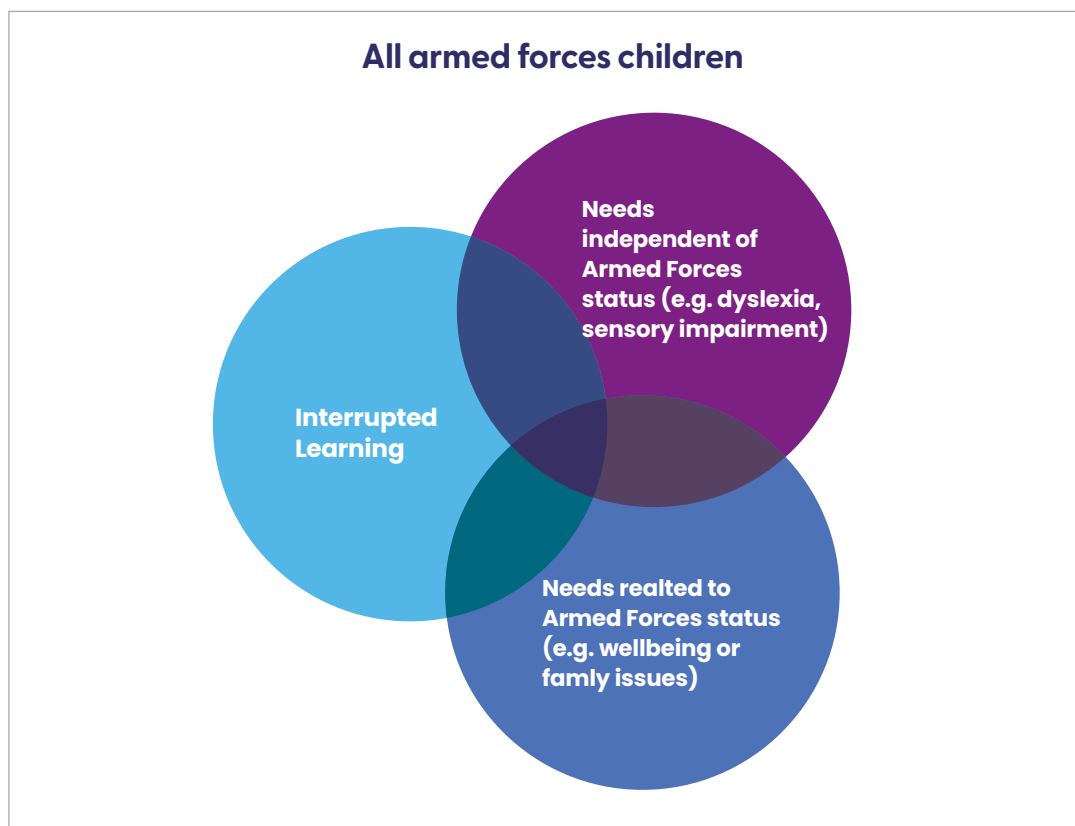
¹⁷⁰ Pupil census supplementary statistics – gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

¹⁷¹ Wales: Schools' census results: January 2023 Statistics on schools, teachers and pupils including data for local authorities and Wales for January 2023. First published: 19 September 2023 Last updated: 19 September 2023

Table 18: Comparison of conditions recognised as giving rise to a need for additional educational support across the United Kingdom (continued)

England ¹⁶⁸	Northern Ireland ¹⁶⁹	Scotland ¹⁷⁰	Wales ¹⁷¹
	Significant accidental injury		
	Other physical	Physical health problem	
Profound and multiple learning difficulty	Profound and multiple learning difficulties		Profound and multiple learning difficulty
Other difficulty/disability	Unspecified cognitive and learning		
		Interrupted learning	
		English as an additional language	
		Looked after or adopted	
		More able pupil	
		Young carer	
		Bereavement	
		Substance abuse	
		Family issues	
Hearing Impairment	Severe/profound hearing loss	Hearing impairment	Hearing impairment
	Mild/moderate hearing loss		
Visual Impairment	Blind	Visual impairment	Visual impairment
	Partially sighted		
Multi-sensory impairment	Multi-sensory impairment	Deaf/blind	Multi-sensory impairment
	Epilepsy		
	Asthma		
	Diabetes		
	Anaphylaxis		
	Down syndrome (sic)		
	Other medical condition/syndrome		
	Interaction of complex medical needs		
	Other		

Figure 2: Schematic representation of the additional support needs of armed forces children



In specific relation to armed forces children the complexity of considering the needs of individuals is shown in Figure 2, above. Most importantly, the status as an “armed forces child” does not immediately mean that an individual has additional support needs. Indeed, the information presented in chapter 7 shows this is very far from the case where the majority of such children do not have additional support needs. For those armed forces children and young people who do have additional support needs it is possible to attribute these to the three factors shown in Figure 2. There will be those whose schooling history, with one or more moves of school may experience difficulties arising from interrupted learning.¹⁷² A second group will have needs that are completely independent of their armed forces status and which would have existed irrespective of their parents’ employment – sensory impairments, physical impairment or neuro-diverse conditions are obvious examples. A third group may have needs arising from the conditions of their parents’ service, most obviously mental health issues caused by stress during an operational deployment. Some children and young people may be experiencing more than one of these conditions in combination.

¹⁷² It being noted that an armed forces child who has missed schooling through, for example hospitalisation, or ill health will also potentially have interrupted learning, even with no move of school.

Further, it might at least be reasonably expected that the conditions identified in the Scottish code would be reflected in the data collected and published by the Scottish Government. However, Table 19 shows the lack of congruence between the categories identified in the code and the national data collection and additional support needs publication.¹⁷³ For the purposes of the present discussion, the most obvious and important difference is that while the code identifies “Are children of parents in the Armed Forces”, no data is collected or published on this category. It should be noted, also, that some categories such as the numbers of looked after children are the subject of data publication, but not as an integral part of the additional support needs statistics. Still others, such as “autistic spectrum disorder” might be mapped to a category such as “Have barriers to learning as a result of a health need, such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder” but that association is not explicit. Similarly, some categories such as “Living with parents with mental health problems” is given in the national code, while “Mental health problems” is the category used in the data collection which is a different nuance; one is focused on the family, the other on the individual.

Implication

In the official publications armed forces families moving to Scotland may find a clear identification of their children’s needs which have been diagnosed elsewhere, or which they recognise in their child. This is not guaranteed, however, and the lack of congruence between official publications may contribute to doubt, or confusion, on whether a child may qualify for support.

Table 19: Recognition of conditions which give rise to additional support needs in Scotland

Categories of additional support needs established in the Scottish code of practice¹⁷⁴	Categories of additional support needs which the Scottish Government collect and publish data
Have motor or sensory impairments	Hearing impairment, visual impairment deaf blind, physical or motor impairment
Have low birth weight	
Are being bullied	
Are children of parents in the Armed Forces	
Are particularly able or talented	More able pupil
Have experienced a bereavement	Bereavement
Are affected by imprisonment of a family member	
Are interrupted learners	Interrupted learning
Have a learning disability	Learning disability
Have barriers to learning as a result of a health need, such as foetal alcohol spectrum disorder	
Are looked after by a local authority	Looked after or who have been adopted
Have a learning difficulty, such as dyslexia	Dyslexia Other specific learning disability e.g. numeric
Are living with parents who are abusing substances	Substance abuse
Are living with parents who have mental health problems	Family issues
Have English as an additional language	English as an additional language
Are not attending school regularly	
Have emotional or social difficulties	Social emotional and behavioural difficulty
Are on the child protection register	
Are refugees	
Are young carer	Young carer
	Autistic spectrum disorder
	Language or speech disorder
	Communication support needs
	Risk of exclusion
	Mental health problem
	Other moderate learning difficulty
	Physical health problem

¹⁷⁴ Page 11, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017

Beyond these difficulties of interpretation, confidence in the way additional educational support works across the UK will be eroded in the minds of parents and young people by some of the commentaries in the public domain. These comments do not specifically relate to armed forces children and young people, but they do provide a general background as potentially applying to all families.

In relation to the SEND system in England reference has already been made to the high failure rate amongst councils in cases going to the tribunal. However, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has had harsh words regarding the operation of the SEND system and records a similar uphold rate to the SEND Tribunal:

“Back then [2017] we found... there was significant confusion in local authorities and their health partners about their new responsibilities. We upheld nearly 80% of our first 100 investigations.In 2018-19, we received 45% more complaints than in 2016-17 (315 cases up from 217) and we carried out 80% more detailed investigations (126 up from 70). But most concerning of all, is that we upheld nearly nine out of 10 investigations (87%) last year. This is exceptional and unprecedented in our work. It compares with an average uphold rate of 57% for all investigations discounting SEND cases. We upheld nearly 9 out of 10 of investigations last year. This is exceptional and unprecedented.”¹⁷⁵

The impact on families was recorded as being:

“Always on the receiving end of these problems are children missing out on the support to which they are entitled, and families left to pick up the pieces. With inevitable delays, frustration and distress, we often see parents having to fight the system that was established to support them. It is not uncommon to hear the SEND process described as a battleground. While I recognise, we investigate a relatively small number of complaints compared to the number of children and young people with EHC plans, these stories give a barometer of how the system is working for those people. It paints a worrying picture when compared with levels of fault we find elsewhere.”¹⁷⁶

In turn this official position has been echoed by strong statements coming from the UK Parliament:

“Navigating the SEND system should not be a bureaucratic nightmare, difficult to navigate and requiring significant levels of legal knowledge and personal resilience. A child’s access to support should not be determined by a parent’s education, their social capital or the advice and support of people with whom they happen to come into contact. In some cases, parental empowerment has not happened. Children and parents are not ‘in the know’ and for some the law may not even appear to exist. Parents currently need a combination of special knowledge and social capital to navigate the system, and even then, are left exhausted by the experience. Those without significant personal or social capital therefore face significant disadvantage. For some, Parliament might as well not have bothered to legislate.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Page 1, “Not going to plan? - Education, Health and Care plans two years on”, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, 2019

¹⁷⁶ Page 2, *ibid*

¹⁷⁷ Pages 86-87, “House of Commons Education Committee Special educational needs and disabilities First Report of Session 2019”

This same report issued in 2019 and quoted above concluded:

*“These adversarial experiences are the products of poor implementation, the inability to access the right support at the right time, and services struggling with limited resources. We were warned: Parliament was told that if the reforms were not done properly, the system had the potential to become more adversarial. Not enough was done to prevent this happening. We have a system of unmet need and strain. This unmet need is creating poor broader experiences, for children, young people and their families, schools, colleges and local authorities.”*¹⁷⁸

Since the 2019 report the position was not being viewed any more positively by UK politicians. The overall situation was captured by some of the comments made by elected members in the UK Parliament on 11 January 2024¹⁷⁹ while debating SEND support in England that ultimately resolved “That this House calls for a review of funding for SEND provision”:

“Parents were tired of fighting for the right school place, for a statement, which would later become an EHCP, or for the right transport to get their child to the education setting they needed... They are still tired... The sad truth is those parents are worn out.”

(Caroline Nokes MP)

“The system is a complete mess. There is a huge shortage of specialist provision and enhanced mainstream provision, so children are forced into schools that do not have the expertise to manage their needs. That leads to exclusion, isolation and children being withdrawn. Support staff do not have adequate training or care, and many are paid less than those working in supermarkets.”

(Alex Sobel MP)

Against this background, an active campaigning group has formed which sets out its position as being:

*“SEND National Crisis is a parent-led volunteer campaign group that has united disabled children and young people along with their families, professionals and other supporters around England and Wales, raising awareness of the national crisis in SEND education and demand that the Government acts to end the flawed system in funding and delivering education, health and social care provision.”*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Page 89, House of Commons Education Committee Special educational needs and disabilities First Report of Session 2019”

¹⁷⁹ Hansard for 11 January 2024.

¹⁸⁰ About SEND National Crisis · SEND Community Alliance

The position in Northern Ireland is slightly more nuanced than in England although the level of criticism levelled at the special educational needs system in the province has been severe. This nuancing is attributable to the review of provision that has taken place, resulting in production of the draft code of practice discussed earlier, and the recognition of the issues flowing from the suspension of the Stormont Assembly that ended in January 2024. In 2017 the auditor general had observed in relation to SEN provision in Northern Ireland:

*“As a result of our review, we can only conclude that neither the Department nor the EA can currently demonstrate value for money in terms of economy, efficiency or effectiveness in the provision of support to children with SEN in mainstream schools. [There must be] ... continued efforts to reduce delays in issuing statements.”*¹⁸¹

Deficiencies in the Northern Ireland system have also been noted in academic research, for example by O'Connor et al (2023) in a thorough data-based analysis of the special educational needs population noted in relation to strategic developments:

*“A substantive review was commenced in 2006; over fifteen years later, and at a currently operational cost of £3.6 million, aspects of the review remain incomplete and scrutiny of the system continues to identify profound failings.”*¹⁸²

While at the practical level the same researchers noted that:

*“Over the past five years, there has been a steady increase in the number of parents challenging statutory decisions around SEN, and a significantly high proportion is conceded in favour of the parent/carer before the matter proceeds to a tribunal hearing.”*¹⁸³

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) had published a hard-hitting report into SEN provision under the title *“Too Little, Too Late”*¹⁸⁴ which included 40 recommendations for improvement. A progress report published in 2023 gave a mildly pessimistic view of progress:

*“Northern Ireland has a higher proportion of children with SEN needs than the rest of the UK (sic). For too long parents and carers have been fighting for their children’s right to be educated in an environment where their specific needs are respected and approached with dignity.... Although the commitment by relevant authorities to reform SEN education is apparent and encouraging, there is a real prospect that progress will soon grind to a halt when it should be accelerating.”*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Pages 3–4, Special Educational Needs, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, 27th June 2017, Northern Ireland

¹⁸² Page 543, O'Connor U., Courtenay C., Mulhall P., and Taggart L., “The prevalence of special educational needs in Northern Ireland: A comparative analysis”, European Journal of Special Needs Education, Volume 38 – Issue 4, 2023

¹⁸³ Page 553, *ibid*

¹⁸⁴ “Too Little, Too Late: A Rights Based Review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) Provision in Mainstream Schools in Northern Ireland”, NICCY, March 2020

¹⁸⁵ *ibid*

A statement on the Northern Ireland department of Education website acknowledges:

*“The Department of Education (DE) and Education Authority (EA) are committed to meeting the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) by ensuring the right support from the right people, at the right time, and in the right place. We know this is currently not the case for many children with SEN in Northern Ireland. All too often, investment has not resulted in improved outcomes for all children with SEN and we recognise that there is an **urgent** need for improvement.*

We have heard consistently from stakeholders about the range of challenges across the SEN system, extending from difficulties accessing services through to the lack of advice and support available to both parents/carers and schools.”¹⁸⁶

The position in Wales is in advance of the position in Northern Ireland in that significant changes have been introduced replacing the former special educational needs system with the one based on the concept of additional learning needs. At the time of writing this study, the new system had only just reached full implementation, it is therefore not possible to make strong statements about how successful, or otherwise, the new system is in meeting children’s needs. In any event this is less important than establishing the level of confidence in the new system amongst parents and the community more generally.

Like England and Northern Ireland, the new Welsh system continues to gather headlines in the media. Examples include coverage by the BBC on 03 November 2022:

“[Parent K’s] fight for support for her son started when he was in primary school. He is currently on an Individual Development Plan (IDP), as required by the new ALN system.... [Parent K] believes the system is too complicated in its current form, especially for parents like herself who had no prior experience with learning difficulties.”

That same article reported that “SNAP Cymru - a charity which has dedicated resources to providing advice for parents with questions regarding the change to ALN - has seen a 20% increase in people seeking its guidance since April.”

This view was echoed in the press articles:

“STRETCHED (sic) school budgets are leading to wholly inadequate support for pupils with additional learning needs, the Senedd heard.

MSs told the chamber their post bags are filled with constituents’ concerns about Wales’ new additional learning needs (ALN) system, which is being phased in.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transformation | Education Authority Northern Ireland (eani.org.uk)

¹⁸⁷ Support for ALN youngsters in Wales ‘wholly inadequate’, South Wales Argus, 03 December 2023

There has been some official acknowledgement of the challenges of implementing the new system:

“There still remains some lack of clarity about statutory duties. Some local authorities are struggling with the workload pressures to meet those statutory duties, and, again, there are some inconsistencies across local authorities and schools in terms of the quality and accessibility of information that is available to parents in order to support their own children, and support the school as well in what needs to happen.”¹⁸⁸

In that same debate in the Welsh Assembly, elected members observed:

“Clearly the aim of all of these reforms is to improve the relationship (sic) and to have less conflict. But we’ve heard a great deal of evidence from parents that it continues to be an ongoing battle for their children.”¹⁸⁹

“On additional learning needs, what we hear from a lot of people, from teachers and from parents as well, is that they feel short changed when it comes to ALN.”¹⁹⁰

To be clear, the implication for this study is less on the success, or otherwise, of the implementation of the new system than the level of confidence that parents and young people might have in the system. The new system in Wales has only been fully established, some of the criticisms are therefore unsurprising as being associated with bedding-in issues. They are criticisms none the less which have gained traction in both the media and the Senedd.

Importantly, the Scottish approach has been the subject of periodic and large-scale review. This included the exercise conducted by Angela Morgan with a report published in 2020.¹⁹¹ That review process included consultation with stakeholders involved in the education of armed forces children and identified specific barriers to learning as being *“Frequent moves of school and community; disrupted learning; separation from parents; living with the worry of a parent on active service; direct experience of loss.”*¹⁹² Some of the themes picked up by the report are similar to those found elsewhere in the UK, for example:

“Parents who took part in this research were broadly positive about the relationship and communication they had with their child’s school although some parents expressed that they had had to “push” to improve communication. In addition, parents spoke about the challenges that they had experienced in securing the appropriate support and provision for their children and the length of time that this took. These views appear to be consistent with some views expressed by parents across a number of other sources of evidence who have described their experiences using language such as “fight”, “battle”, etc.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Dyfrig Ellis (Assistant Director, Estyn) at Children, Young People and Education Committee, 21st February 2024

¹⁸⁹ Heledd Fychan, Member of the Senedd, 21 February 2024

¹⁹⁰ James Evans, Member of the Senedd, 21 February 2024

¹⁹¹ “Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential”, (The Angela Morgan Review), Scottish Government, June 2020

¹⁹² Page 134, *ibid*

¹⁹³ Page 105, *ibid*

The Morgan Report included 43 separate recommendations which were being taken forward under a Scottish Government action and concluded:

“There is no fundamental deficit in the principle and policy intention of the Additional Support for Learning legislation and the substantial guidance accompanying it. The challenge is in translating that intention into thousands of individual responses for individual children and young people facing different learning barriers in different family, home, community, nursery, school and college situations.”¹⁹⁴

As part of a comprehensive report bringing together the views of a wide range of stakeholders and which was both forward looking and reflective with a range of positive views, a specific view of ASN provision was given:

“We heard of children and young people who did not receive the necessary supports and resources to meet their needs, including Additional Support Needs, long-term conditions, and disabilities. We heard about distressing incidents and inequities, including use of exclusions, experiences of violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, bullying, harassment, discrimination, anxiety, stress, and ill-health. We listened to people expressing frustration, grief, and anger. We heard a pessimism about what was truly possible and a cynicism about whether genuine educational improvement was intended and could be achieved.”¹⁹⁵

A more nuanced perspective was given in another Scottish Government sponsored report which achieved a degree of balance between the positions of Morgan (2020) and Campbell and Harris (2023) quoted above.

“There have been numerous policies and guidance published since 2012 to support children with complex additional support needs in schools. However, policy alone cannot deliver positive outcomes for children and young people. Despite positive policy intent, this research found that some children, parents and carers are struggling to have children and young people’s needs met to enable them to flourish. This report highlights many examples of good practice that learning can be drawn from, as well as highlighting the barriers and enablers to good practice.”¹⁹⁶

Against the outcomes of this formal research, strident statements in the media about deficiencies in ASN provision are not found as easily as in Wales, Northern Ireland and certainly England. Profound criticism is not absent however. The BBC on 28 June 2021 published an article *“Funding for Additional Support Need pupils falls by £1,000 per child”* focusing on the apparent diminution of resources available to children with ASN.

¹⁹⁴ Page 63, *ibid*

¹⁹⁵ Pages 2-4 “All Learners in Scotland Matter: The National Discussion on Education Final Report”, Campbell C and Harris A, Scottish Government and CoSLA, June 2023

¹⁹⁶ Page 6, “Research into Provision for Pupils with Complex Additional Support Needs in Scotland”, (The Humanly report”, Scottish Government, 2023

This theme was echoed in TV coverage as recently as 22 March 2024 which drew on figures published that week by the Scottish Government. It was pointed out that the numbers of children with ASN had grown seven-fold between 2007 and 2023 from 5.3% of the school population to 36.7% while the numbers of additional support needs teachers had reportedly fallen by 500 since 2010. In this coverage a parent caught a headline with: *“They are very good at saying they are Getting It Right for Every Child; they definitely aren’t.”* Based on the same data that had caught media interest at least one MSP identified apparent problems with the resourcing of ASN provision;

“The data that was published yesterday shows that there was one specialist support teacher for 40 pupils in 2013 and that there is now one specialist support teacher for 89 pupils... There are 392 fewer specialist teachers now than there were 10 years ago.”

The largest teachers’ union in Scotland, the website of the Educational Institute of Scotland states *“We have serious concerns about ASN provision in Scotland at present”* and supports that position with information based on a 2018, and therefore pre-COVID, survey:

- *“78.2% of respondents (from a total of over 12,000) disagreed or strongly disagreed that provision for children and young people with ASN in their school was adequate.*
- *42% of teacher working in support for learning said they regularly worked more than 8 extra unpaid hours a week.*
- *86% of support for learning teachers said their stress levels were high.*
- *52% of all respondents cited the struggle to meet the needs of young people with additional support needs as the single greatest cause of their stress at work.*

The inertia around ASN resourcing is also letting down families who see the damage that the lack of support does to their children, who are upset by it and are either, where they have capacity, forced into advocacy activity that they should not have to be engaged in; or where they do not have capacity, continue to be distressed by their child’s struggle.”¹⁹⁷

This view was repeated by the EIS in a report in 2019¹⁹⁸ which was re-endorsed on 20 April 2023. It must be pointed out, however, that these views expressed by the EIS are very much in the context of a wider campaign to improve the working conditions of teachers, as they see them, and to secure additional resources.

¹⁹⁷ EIS Submission to the Education, Children and Young People Committee for impact of COVID-19 on children and young people with additional support needs, 17 November 2021.

¹⁹⁸ “Additional Support for Learning in Scottish School Education: Exploring the gap between promise and practice”, Educational Institute of Scotland May 2019

More recently, the EIS reiterated this position:

“Learners who have additional support needs can experience reduced morale and lower self-esteem due to: receiving less support to have their needs met than is required; being less supported to take part in enrichment/after school activities than is required; higher levels of general anxiety; being more likely to display challenging behaviour; being more involved in more violent incidents, fights and low-level disruption to learning; and experiencing a loss of dignity eg. when they exhibit high levels of distress.”¹⁹⁹

Similar concerns have also been expressed by the Accounts Commission:

“It’s distressing and frustrating that we repeatedly hear of the barriers that some families fight against to get the right support to help their child to learn. Too often, families are worn down by a prolonged search for the right support, and by having to manage a crisis that could have and should have been avoided. Families are partners with public services and should be regarded as such...

From the information that is available, even the current measures show wide disparity. We know that children and young people who need additional support don’t always get the opportunities they deserve.”²⁰⁰

As a consequence of similar concerns being expressed by MSPs the Children and Young People’s Committee felt it had to respond and in late 2023 made a call for submissions of evidence from parents and carers about the services that local authorities and schools were providing. This was part of a wider enquiry announced on 25 October 2023 into the operation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.²⁰¹ At the core of the core of concerns was the marked rise in the number of children and young people with additional support needs and whether there were sufficient resources, particularly in staffing, to ensure their effective learning.²⁰² A typical view was:

“A month or so ago, I met a group of parents, all of whom have children with additional support needs. They were very critical. They pointed out that their children were being failed when they were put into mainstream schooling and the additional support teachers were not there to support them. Not only are those parents’ children not being supported but, because teachers are struggling to support them, they are not able to support the rest of the children in the class. The point that the parents made to me was that the Government’s policies mean that we are not getting it right for many children, never mind getting it right for every child.”²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Page 9, “Stand Up for Quality Education-Focus on ASN Provision”, Scottish Education Journal, Vol 108, Issue no 2, April 2024

²⁰⁰ “Additional support for learning – the gap between ambition and reality for our children”, Accounts Commission, 17 May 2022

²⁰¹ Education, Children and Young People Committee 20 February 2024

²⁰² Sue Webber MSP, 01 February 2024

²⁰³ Alex Rowley MSP, speaking in the Scottish Parliament at the Education, Children and Young People Committee, 17 January 2024.

This general position was acknowledged by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills²⁰⁴ on 20 March 2024:

“Parents often feel that they have to fight against the system to get their voices heard and their young person diagnosed, and that does not reflect the intention behind the 2004 act.”²⁰⁵

Having taken evidence from parents, practitioners, stakeholder groups and professional associations the committee issued its report on 15 May 2024. It reserved especial criticisms for aspects of the presumption of mainstream education, one of the fundamental tenets of the Scottish, and other, education systems. Overall, Sue Webber MSP, convenor of the Education, Children and Young People Committee commented:

“The situation faced by children and young people with additional support needs is intolerable.

During our inquiry, we were extremely concerned to hear about negative experiences of additional support for learning provision, the educating of children and young people in mainstream schools and the detrimental impact this has had on some pupils, their parents and carers, and teachers and support staff. Things must change.”

For armed forces families moving to Scotland who have children requiring additional support these words will not be reassuring. It is also important to recognise that any failure to make effective provision may be much more attributable to the general pressure on the education system throughout the UK, rather than being specific to membership of the Armed Forces.

The evidence from the tribunals

One measure of the confidence that parents and young people have in the operation of the various pupil support systems is the number of cases being referred to the various tribunals established for this purpose. It has already been noted that the criteria for referral to a tribunal varies between the UK jurisdictions so an absolute comparison is not possible. In this context it is also the case that the Scottish Tribunal records information in a different way to elsewhere in the UK. However, the general levels of referral, the trends in referrals and the determinations being made do give a strong indication of how successfully provision is being made at local authority and school levels. For England, in the academic year 2022/23, His Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) recorded 14,000 registered SEN appeals, an increase of 24% when compared to 2021/22. Of the cases decided, 98% (7,800) were in favour of the appellant, up 2 percentage points on 2021/22.²⁰⁶ Owing to concerns about these statistics the Administrative Justice Council conducted an investigation and concluded that:

²⁰⁴ “Cabinet secretary” is the term used in Scotland for the senior minister in a portfolio area.

²⁰⁵ Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Page 10, Report of Education, Children and Young People Committee, 20 March 2024

²⁰⁶ Tribunal Statistics Quarterly July to September 2023”, published 14 December 2023 Tribunal Statistics Quarterly: July to September 2023 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

“LAs are responsible for a significant part of the problem. Using survey data provided by 12 salaried SEND tribunal judges over a period of six weeks, this research identified that, in the opinion of the judge, there were significant flaws with either the initial decision itself or the LA’s subsequent participation in the appeal in 50% of cases.”²⁰⁷

The appeals system in Northern Ireland is under similar increasing pressure. However, part of this is attributable to the ambiguous status of the code of practice discussed earlier which in turn is related to the long-term suspension of the Stormont assembly. Figures for appeals to the SEN Tribunal in Northern Ireland are not routinely published, however a response to a freedom of information request has revealed that the number of appeals has grown significantly between 2019 and 2024 with a 52% increase. Very high numbers of cases – 302 in 2022–2023 or 60% are conceded by the authority while relatively low numbers, less than 11 in any of the previous 5 years, are dismissed. This caused SENAC to observe:

“Of 122 appeals supported by SENAC in the last four years on the refusal to carry out a statutory assessment, 68% were conceded after the appeal was lodged and 30% after submission of the case statement. Only 2% went to be contested at hearing. Significantly, in in most of the cases no new or additional evidence was submitted. These figures suggest that as a result of an appeal being lodged, the EA reversed their initial refusal and initiated a statutory assessment with no further action or information required from the parent. This is concerning and raises questions...”²⁰⁸

By way of contrast, in Wales, figures provided by the Education Tribunal for Wales²⁰⁹ show a decline in the number of cases being referred to the tribunal with 137 in 2021–2022 compared to 48 in 2022–2023. Of these, only a minority (4%) resulted in a decision against the local authority in 2022–23 whereas 62% were either withdrawn or struck out.

The position in Scotland presents a mixed picture to that found elsewhere in the UK. By 2021/2022 appeals to Scotland’s ASN Tribunal were reported as returning to “almost pre-pandemic high intake levels”. Figures provided by the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service²¹⁰ show an increase in the number of cases being referred to the tribunal with 202 in 2022–2023, compared to 110 in 2021–2022 and 113 in 2018–2019. This most recent volume of cases was reported as an all-time high.²¹¹ However, of these, only a minority (10%) resulted in a decision against the local authority in 2022–23 whereas 88% were either withdrawn or struck out.

²⁰⁷ Page 6, “Special Educational Needs and Disability: Improving Local Authority Decision Making, Report of the Administrative Justice Council’s Working Group on Special Educational Needs and Disability”, July 2023

²⁰⁸ Page 19, “A Reflective Analysis Of SENAC’S Tribunal Support And Representation Service And Parental Experience Of Appealing To SENDIST”, SENAC, November 2021

²⁰⁹ Page 23, “Education Tribunal for Wales Annual Report 2022 – 2023”, Education Tribunal for Wales 2024

²¹⁰ Response to a Freedom of Information request under Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, dated 09 April 2024

²¹¹ “Health and Education Chamber for Scotland First Tier tribunal Bulletin”, October 2023

The tribunals' services statistics yield a relatively objective measure of the efficiency of the educational support systems within and across the UK. With the exception of Wales, where the system has recently changed, parents and young people are increasingly challenging the decisions of local authorities. If the experience gained is in England or Northern Ireland then the high success rates of appeals will significantly diminish the confidence of parents and young people in the decisions being made by local authorities in relation to their needs. When they come to Scotland, although there is an increasing propensity to challenge decisions, the relatively low levels of successful appeals would be at least some justification for a higher, if not absolute, level of confidence in the system.

Implications

Problems of additional support provision are a general feature of the UK's four jurisdictions and are not unique to the Armed Forces.

It cannot be assumed that everyone's experience of educational support systems will be the same.

A parent who has lived in another part of the UK before moving to Scotland will have their views, and thus confidence, conditioned by their previous experience. It is likely that a family moving from England in particular will be accustomed to the SEND system which is subject to extensive and deep criticism and in which there is poor confidence at every level. This general experience will also be true, although to different degrees in Northern Ireland and Wales. This experience may be characterised as being adversarial and having to fight for resources or their children's needs to be recognised. Such families may well believe that they will have the same experience in Scotland.

This feeling may be mitigated both by the inclusive nature of the Scottish education system and the higher levels of additional needs than are acknowledged elsewhere in the UK, but it will not be totally assuaged. The reason for this is that Scotland itself is not immune from the types of criticism, particularly with regard to resourcing, found elsewhere in the UK.

Armed forces families presently resident in Scotland, and who are planning a move to England, Northern Ireland and Wales, will be faced with a complex picture, requiring high quality information and advice. This would be true in all circumstances, but it is particularly relevant if they have a child assessed as having additional support needs and if it is believed those needs are at such a level that there may be an entitlement to support in the jurisdiction to which they are moving. Such a family's views should be conditioned not just by a knowledge of the system to which they are moving, but the level of confidence they can have in the operation of that system. Based on the evidence presented here in some cases that level of confidence, with justification, might be extremely low. Moreover, particularly if a move to Wales or Northern Ireland is contemplated, they would also have to take a view on the trajectory for improvement. In the case of Wales, changes have been made towards improvement, but their outcome is not yet known, while in Northern Ireland the need for change has been recognised, but the actual improvement programme is not yet distinct.

How policy impacts on the numbers of children requiring additional support

For children and parents, the statements in policy documents such as the national codes of practice probably matter less than how they are impacted by actual practice. Clearly, this will be heavily dependent on the procedures operating at local authority and school levels and how these are applied. This given, it is possible to examine the data and information available nationally to make some statements that give an insight into the issues confronting families.

In Scotland the procedures associated with meeting additional support needs emanates from the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. This superseded the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 which looked familiar to other UK legislation since it was based on making provision for children with “special educational needs”. Table 20 shows the trend in the additional support needs population once the 2004 Act started to gain traction through implementation. Thus in 2007 just 5.3% (approximately 1 in 20 pupils) of the school population was assessed as having additional support needs. By 2023 this figure had risen to 36.7% or slightly over 1 in 3 pupils. For secondary schools at 42.9% the proportion is beginning to approach half of the school population. Notes on the interpretation of descriptive pupil data are included in Appendix 3.

Table 20: Percentages of the school roll in Scotland having additional support needs 2007-2023

Year	Percentage of overall school roll having additional support needs	Percentage of primary school roll having additional support needs	Percentage of primary school roll having additional support needs
2007/08	5.3	4.4	4.3
2008/09	5.7	4.8	4.7
2009/10	6.5	5.4	5.8
2010/11	10.3	9.4	9.5
2011/12	14.7	13.9	13.7
2012/13	17.6	16.9	16.5
2013/14	19.5	18.4	19.1
2014/15	20.8	19.3	20.8
2015/16	22.5	20.4	23.6
2016/17	24.9	22.3	26.8
2017/18	26.6	23.5	29.3
2018/19	28.7	25.4	31.7
2019/20	30.9	27.0	34.6
2020/21	32.3	27.8	36.6
2021/22	33.0	27.7	38.2
2022/23	34.2	28.3	40.1
2023/24	36.7	30.4	42.9

Source: Scottish Government²¹²

This annual increase of approximately 2% per year is thought at this scale to be unlikely to be related to any direct increase in the actual numbers of children requiring support. Rather it is generally thought to be a result of changes in the assessment and identification of children's needs. The definition of whether a child has additional support needs is therefore not a matter of the application of absolute criteria, but is rather a matter of judgement. This recognition comes from the realisation that there were significant numbers of children in 2007 who, had they been in schools in 2023 would have been held to deserve support but who were not formally recognised as such. There is also no evidence as yet that this increasing trend has peaked, so the inference is that today there are children going unidentified. Recognition of this point leads to the view that the result of any additional support needs assessment or classification cannot be safely regarded as an absolute. It is, however, an issue requiring discussion between professionals, parents and child. The value of such a discussion would clearly be enhanced by any evidence from a previous educational placement as an armed forces family moves from one location to another.

Any such discussion would also require an awareness of the differences in the populations defined as requiring additional support between the four jurisdictions. Table 21 shows that the proportions of children deemed to require additional support with their education differs between the four jurisdictions. This picture is complicated because of the change in legislation in Wales, with a new code coming into force in 2021. However, the salient and clear fact is that consistently the proportion of children assessed as requiring additional support in Scotland is significantly above the rest of the UK. In comparison to England the proportion of children assessed as having additional support needs was approximately twice as high for each year. Although the proportion of SEND children has increased annually in England, the rate of increase at 0.5% per year is not as steep as the growth in ASN children in Scotland which is about 1% per year. It is therefore safe to assume, even without the application of a statistical test, that there are fundamental differences between the additional support needs population in Scotland and the SEND population in England. This echoes the findings of O'Connor et al (2022)²¹³ who analysed the trends and levels of incidence in the populations of children requiring additional support across the four UK jurisdictions noting significant differences.

In terms of practical effects this may be thought of in terms of these two cases:

Case 1: A child with no assessment as being SEND in England moves to Scotland

On average less than 1 in 5 children will have assessment as having SEND, but approximately 1 in 3 will be assessed as having an additional support need in Scotland. There is therefore a significant chance that their educational status will change with a recognition of a need for support that previously was not there.

²¹³ O'Connor P., Courtney C., Mulhall P., and Taggart L., "The prevalence of special educational needs in Northern Ireland: A comparative analysis", *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, Volume 38, Issue 4, 2022.

Table 21: Comparison of percentages of children assessed as requiring educational support in England, Northern Ireland and Wales

	England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
Year	Percentage of school roll with special educational needs disability (SEND) ²¹⁴	Percentage of school roll with special educational needs (SEN) ²¹⁵	Percentage of overall school roll having additional support needs (ASN)	Percentage of children with SEN/ additional learning needs ²¹⁶
2018/19	15.0	23.0	28.7	23.9
2019/20	15.4	19.5	30.9	22.4
2020/21	15.9	19.5	32.3	19.5
2021/22	16.6	18.4	33.0	15.8
2022/23	17.3	18.9	34.2	14.9
2023/24	18.4	19.2	36.7	13.4

Note: The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021 (the ALN Code) and regulations came into force on 1 September 2021 with children moving from the special educational needs (SEN) system to the additional learning needs (ALN) system in groups over 3 years. The 2022 schools census represents the first submissions from dedicated ALN Coordinators across Wales

Case 2: A child with an assessment as having ASN in Scotland moves to England

Conversely, for a child moving from Scotland who has additional support needs recognised there is a significant chance that this need will not be formally recognised when they move to England, or indeed any other part of the UK. This may involve either removal of a resource or that other adjustments to learning and teaching will cease

In either case 1 or case 2 there would be a need for a careful discussion with both child and parent on the nature of any change and its implications for the learning journey.

Table 22: Percentage of children requiring a statutory plan across the United Kingdom 2022/23

	England (EHCP) ²¹⁷	Northern Ireland (Statement) ²¹⁸	Scotland (CSP) ²¹⁹	Wales (IDP) ²²⁰
2022-23	4.3%	6.9%	0.19%	2.2%
2023-24	4.8%	7.6%	0.19%	3.9%

There is, however, a further complication to the discussion. Table 22 shows the variation across the UK in the proportion of children requiring a statutory plan. These are the young people within the definitions of requiring some form of additionality who merit an extra level of protection found in one of the formal plans set out in the legislation within each jurisdiction. It is difficult to interpret the figure for Wales due to the recent change in legislation there. However, Scotland stands out having an extremely low incidence of co-ordinated support plans (CSPs) at 0.19% in 2023 as compared to 4.8% in England for education and healthcare plan (EHCP) and Northern Ireland with 7.6% for a statement and Wales at 3.9% for an IDP.

²¹⁷ Source: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/>

²¹⁸ Source: Annual enrolments at schools and in funded pre-school education in Northern Ireland 2022-23 NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)

²¹⁹ Schools in Scotland 2023 Supplementary Tables,

²²⁰ Source: Schools' census results: January 2023 Statistics on schools, teachers and pupils including data for local authorities and Wales for January 2023.

Given the high recorded incidence of additional support needs in Scotland, this is counter-intuitive. Thus, while high numbers of children in Scotland are categorised as ASN, extremely low numbers qualify for a CSP with only 1,318 in 2023/24. However, the Scottish Government statistics show that 33,322 (4.7%) qualify for an individualised education programme (IEP) and 49,200 (6.9%) qualify for a child's plan. These latter figures are more in accordance with the EHCP and statement figures for England and Northern Ireland respectively. It is clear, though, that the parents of any child moving between Scotland and the rest of the UK, or vice versa, and who has needs demanding statutory plan, will encounter a radically different system best thought of in terms of Case 3 and Case 4 below.

Case 3: A child with an EHCP in England moves to Scotland

The extremely low incidence of CSPs in Scotland means that there is only a small likelihood that such a child will qualify for the statutory plan that might be assumed by the possession of an EHCP. They may, however have their needs met through the inclusive practices found in Scottish schools under general ASN provision. This may find expression through provision of an IEP or child's plan.

Case 4: A child with a CSP or an IEP in Scotland moves to another UK jurisdiction

In terms of the numbers of children affected, it would appear that possession of a CSP should automatically demand provision administered through an EHCP (England), statement (Northern Ireland) or IDP (Wales). However, those children with an IEP in Scotland should also be considered for this level of provision.

When viewed in this way some of the advice available is extremely misleading to parents. For example, the SENSE website states, *"In Scotland, the term 'additional support needs' is used for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities."*²²¹ This discussion shows that this is very far from being the case.

Implication

The references to transfer of records found in the various national codes of practice in relation to Scottish CSPs is therefore extremely misleading, as it is more likely that an IEP is the better reference point both for a child who has an EHCP or who, on moving to the rest of the UK may qualify for an EHCP (England), statement (Northern Ireland) or IDP (Wales).

²²¹ <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-stages/childhood-and-school/send-education-special-education-needs-disabilities/additional-support-needs-for-learning-in-scotland/>



Chapter 7:

Armed Forces Children in Scottish Schools

In October 2023 ADES collected information on the numbers of armed forces children with additional support needs in Scottish local authority schools. This was part of a wider exercise to gather data on the overall numbers of armed forces children. There is no collection of information either on numbers of armed forces children nor the incidence of additional support needs as part of the annual pupil census the results of which are published annually by the Scottish Government. The ADES exercise is therefore the sole source of information on the armed forces pupil population in Scotland.²²² The results of this exercise for armed forces children with additional support needs in academic session 2023–24 is shown in Tables 18 and 19. A specific commentary on the data collection is included in Appendix 3. In 2023 there were 4119 armed forces children with additional support needs in Scotland compared to an overall population of 12,828 of armed forces children.

Eighteen of Scotland's 32 local authorities made a return indicating that there were no armed forces children with additional support needs in the early years' sector. This is unlikely to be a truly representative figure due to delivery of provision in this sector being through a mixture of partner (private or third sector) providers and local authority establishments creating a divided system. The SEEMiS management information system used by all local authorities has not yet fully integrated the early years into its coverage. Therefore, the figures for early years are likely to be significantly understated. The detailed figures for primary and secondary schools provided in Table 23 which are also provided in summary form in Table 24. The picture, therefore, is of a range of values between 1.3% and 51.7% for primary schools and 1.7% and 53.2% for secondary schools. Four authorities – Aberdeenshire, Edinburgh, Eilean Siar (Western Isles) and Highland – recorded over 50% of armed forces children attending secondary schools having additional support needs. Significantly 25 authorities had overall totals within the 20% to 40% range. Even given the limitations of the data therefore it can be seen that a significant proportion of armed forces children are assessed as having additional support needs. Moreover, and importantly, that level of incidence of additional support needs is comparable to the school population as a whole. The national percentages of children with additional support needs for 2023–24 was 30.4% for primary schools, 42.9% for secondary schools and 36.7% overall as compared to the armed forces' pupil population with 28.1%, 39.2% and 32.1% respectively²²³.

²²² There is no service pupil premium, or equivalent, in Scotland and so, unlike England, information from this source is not available.

²²³ Scottish School Statistics Supplementary Table 2023–24, published 19 March 2024.

Table 23: Percentage of armed forces children with additional support needs 2023-24

Local Authority	Early Years	Primary	Secondary	Special	Total
Aberdeen City	0.0	24.8	37.8	100.0	28.0
Aberdeenshire	20.0	44.4	53.2	100.0	46.9
Angus	5.3	24.0	30.6	0.0	25.2
Argyll & Bute	18.3	31.5	35.3	100.0	32.7
Clackmannanshire	0.0	23.0	17.8	100.0	21.6
Dumfries & Galloway	18.2	36.7	39.9	0.0	37.1
Dundee City	0.0	23.5	37.5	100.0	31.4
East Ayrshire	4.8	31.3	35.3	100.0	30.4
East Dunbartonshire	0.0	17.6	28.9	100.0	21.2
East Lothian	0.0	29.5	44.6	0.0	34.7
East Renfrewshire	0.0	29.2	26.9	0.0	27.5
Edinburgh City	5.9	41.7	50.9	100.0	45.2
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	0.0	21.4	50.0	0.0	28.2
Falkirk	0.0	16.7	36.6	100.0	30.3
Fife	8.3	18.4	40.5	100.0	27.6
Glasgow City	100.0	28.0	45.3	100.0	34.8
Highland	14.9	38.8	52.7	0.0	44.3
Inverclyde	0.0	51.7	41.7	100.0	46.7
Midlothian	4.0	33.8	44.1	100.0	35.3
Moray	0.0	28.3	40.3	0.0	33.5
North Ayrshire	10.0	35.1	39.7	100.0	36.9
North Lanarkshire	0.0	11.8	37.1	100.0	22.7
Orkney Islands	0.0	41.7	40.0	0.0	40.0
Perth & Kinross	0.0	23.6	34.0	100.0	28.4
Renfrewshire	6.3	20.6	44.7	100.0	26.3
Scottish Borders	0.0	33.2	31.3	0.0	31.1
Shetland Islands	0.0	30.8	33.3	0.0	30.8
South Ayrshire	0.0	24.1	28.4	0.0	24.4
South Lanarkshire	0.0	1.3	1.7	0.0	1.5
Stirling	20.0	33.7	38.2	100.0	35.2
West Dunbartonshire	41.7	38.9	47.1	100.0	43.9
West Lothian	0.0	26.8	32.9	100.0	29.5
SCOTLAND:	10.4	28.1	39.2	100.0	32.1
Percentage of overall school roll with additional support needs		30.4	42.9		36.7

Table 24: Frequency of percentages of armed forces children with additional support needs reported by Scottish local authorities 2023-24

Percentage	Number of Authorities		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
0-10	1	1	1
10-20	4	1	0
20-30	13	3	12
30-40	10	14	13
40-50	3	9	6
50-60	1	4	0
60+	0	0	0

When the data is analysed by local authority the results can be seen in Charts 1-4 below. Charts 1-2 show the unadjusted percentages of armed forces children with additional support needs (y-axis) mapped against the overall percentage of children with additional support needs for each authority. Charts 3 and 4 show percentages of armed forces children with additional support needs (y-axis) mapped against the percentage of children with additional support needs with the armed forces children extracted, again for each authority. Charts 3 and 4 therefore reduce the element of autocorrelation that is present in Charts 1 and 2. Using the figures for the overall school population given in Appendix 4 it is possible to calculate Spearman's coefficient of rank correlation for each chart:

- Chart 1: Primary population (uncorrected) = 0.67
- Chart 2: Secondary population (uncorrected) = 0.59
- Chart 3: Primary population (corrected) = 0.60
- Chart 4: Secondary population (corrected) = 0.57

Chart 1: Primary Children with Additional Support Needs 2023-24

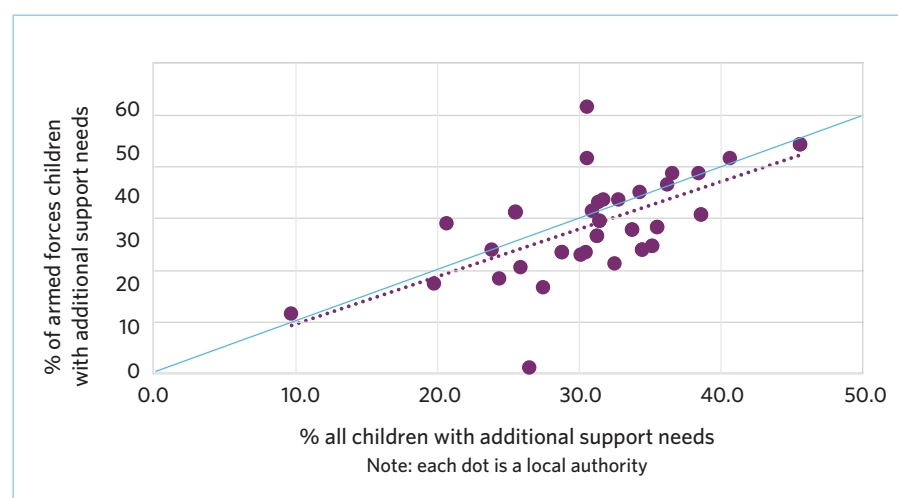
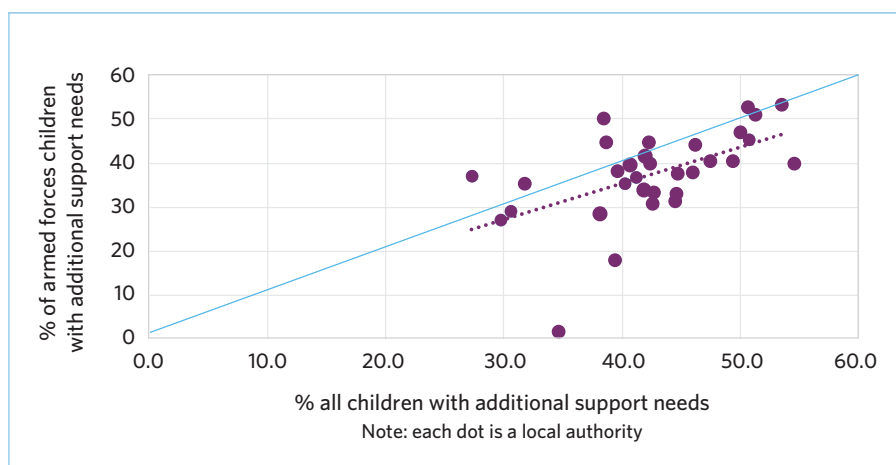
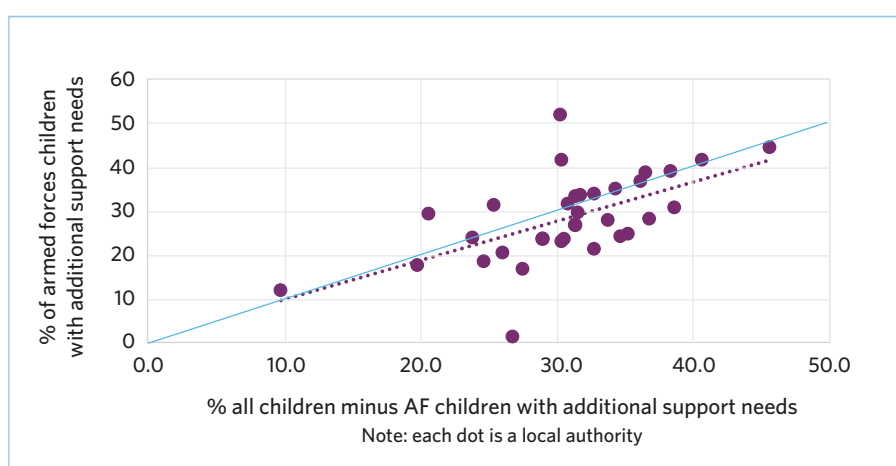


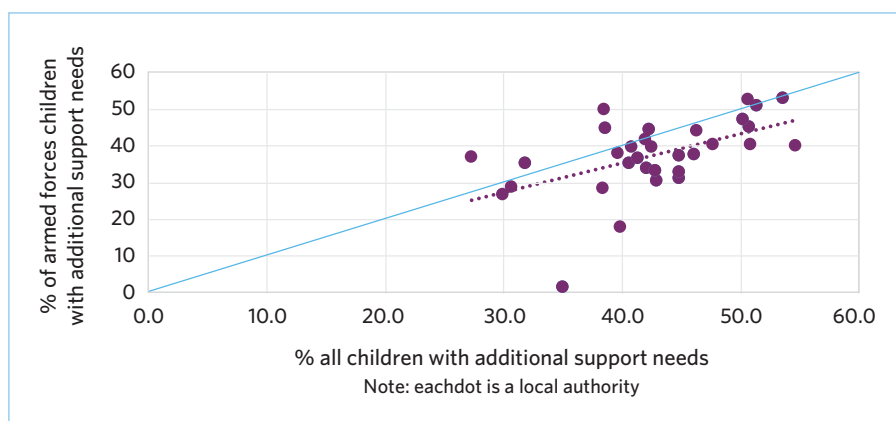
Chart 2: Secondary Children with Additional Support Needs 2023-24



**Chart 3: Primary Pupils with Additional Support Needs 2023-24
With Armed Forces Extracted**



**Chart 4: Secondary Pupils with Additional Support Needs 2023-24
With Armed Forces Extracted**



These figures are of a similar order of magnitude and together indicate a strong correspondence between the armed forces population and the general population. The charts also show, in red, a “null hypothesis” line. This is the notional line that would be true if the percentages of children with additional support needs were the same in the armed forces population as the general population. The blue dotted line is trend line has been inserted by the spreadsheet application and represents an averaging of the data points in each chart. These two lines show that in each case the distribution of armed forces children with additional support needs is broadly similar to that of the overall pupil population. This is a position confirmed by the strong statistical relationship given by the coefficients of rank correlation. However, the fact that trend line is slightly below the null hypothesis line confirms the view from the overall averages that incidence of additional support needs is slightly lower than might be expected from the population as a whole. This is unexpected given some of the anecdotal evidence about the additional support needs characteristics of the armed forces population. It should be noted that also, that elsewhere in the UK, (Llewelyn et al, 2018)²²⁴ noted a much lower level of reporting of additional needs amongst armed forces children than the general population. They suggested this might be attributable to the challenges in identifying low levels of need in a group that is transient and who may not be in one place long enough to allow proper identification and assessment.

However, it should also be noted that in some authorities where there is a major base presence: Angus (25.2%), Argyll and Bute (32.7%), Fife (27.6%), Midlothian (35.3%), and Moray (33.5%) have lower percentages for armed forces children than the overall national figure. However, Edinburgh (45.2%) and Highland (44.3%) where there is a significant army presence do have a higher percentage than would be expected from the figures for the overall population. More research is required to gain an improved understanding of these higher, local, figures. This is particularly true, given that this is only one year’s data.

Implication

Although the general levels of armed forces children with additional support needs in Scotland is reassuring, more research is needed at local level, particularly where the proportion of children with additional support needs is higher than expected.

²²⁴ Page 28, Llewellyn M., Duggan B., Graham S., and McDonald M., “Research on Experiences of Service Families with Children with Additional Learning Needs in Education in Wales, Final Report”, for SSCE Cymru Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of South Wales and Arad Research May 2018

Table 25: The service background of armed forces children with additional support needs reported by Scottish local authorities 2023-24, percentages (see Note 1)

Local Authority	Regular	Reserve	Veteran	Regular and Reserve or Veteran	Not declared	Total
Aberdeen City	19.1	31.7	31.5	0.0	25.9	28.0
Aberdeenshire	39.6	46.5	46.2	73.1	47.1	46.9
Angus	19.2	34.0	26.8	16.7	0.0	25.2
Argyll & Bute	31.5	25.0	36.2	25.9	33.1	32.7
Clackmannanshire	30.4	20.0	20.8	12.5	0.0	21.6
Dumfries & Galloway	37.0	34.5	36.9	14.3	70.0	37.1
Dundee City	20.0	25.0	34.7	33.3	66.7	31.4
East Ayrshire	30.0	52.9	29.5	16.7	12.5	30.4
East Dunbartonshire	21.8	6.1	24.0	18.2	33.3	21.2
East Lothian	44.1	24.0	34.9	33.3	28.6	34.7
East Renfrewshire	18.8	21.4	28.6	53.8	0.0	27.5
Edinburgh City	45.0	45.8	44.0	50.0	56.5	45.2
Eilean Siar (Western Isles)	0.0	22.2	32.1	0.0	0.0	28.2
Falkirk	38.5	60.0	23.3	0.0	0.0	30.3
Fife	22.9	36.6	28.7	5.8	43.8	27.6
Glasgow City	43.1	28.0	30.9	50.0	0.0	34.8
Highland	45.8	38.2	45.0	34.4	41.4	44.3
Inverclyde	35.6	66.7	53.7	60.0	12.5	46.7
Midlothian	27.2	44.0	37.7	100.0	0.0	35.3
Moray	28.8	23.2	42.5	32.8	37.8	33.5
North Ayrshire	39.6	42.1	34.7	100.0	0.0	36.9
North Lanarkshire	15.7	34.7	22.6	0.0	33.3	22.7
Orkney Islands	20.0	50.0	43.5	0.0	0.0	40.0
Perth & Kinross	28.1	20.9	30.5	26.9	35.7	28.4
Renfrewshire	22.7	20.8	29.6	32.0	16.7	26.3
Scottish Borders	38.5	33.3	28.3	18.2	100.0	31.1
Shetland Islands	100.0	0.0	29.2	0.0	0.0	30.8
South Ayrshire	28.3	23.1	24.1	28.6	11.1	24.4
South Lanarkshire	1.2	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	1.5
Stirling	36.2	8.3	34.8	75.0	0.0	35.2
West Dunbartonshire	42.9	20.0	45.9	72.7	0.0	43.9
West Lothian	29.3	20.9	30.5	26.1	100.0	29.5
SCOTLAND	30.8	30.0	33.0	29.8	36.5	32.1

Note 1: The percentages are the proportion of children within each category compared to the overall armed forces children population in the same category. The total of percentages in each row of the table will therefore not sum to 100%.

Table 26: Frequency of percentages of armed forces children with additional support needs reported by service background 2023-24

Percentage	Number of Authorities				
	Regular	Reserve	Veteran	Regular and Reserve or Veteran	Not declared
0-10	2	4	1	8	13
10-20	6	2	0	6	4
20-30	9	11	12	4	2
30-40	9	7	12	5	5
40-50	5	5	6	2	3
50+	1	4	1	7	5

The service background of families is shown in Tables 25 and 26. Only one local authority in Scotland distinguishes between service, or former service, in the Royal Navy, Army or Royal Air Force. Information in this area is therefore restricted to whether parents are in the regular forces, reserve forces or consider themselves to be veterans. Some families may have two parents serving or having served with one in one category and the other in another category. Thus, for example, the mother could be in the regular forces while the father considers himself to be a veteran. Such families are recorded in the fifth column of Table 25. Some families are prepared to declare themselves as members, or former members, of the Armed Forces but do not identify, or schools do not record, the specific background. Such families are recorded in the sixth or penultimate column of Table 25 labelled “Not declared”.

Tables 25 and 26 show the wide variation between authorities and categories of service for armed forces children with additional support needs, with percentages ranging from 0% to 100%. These extreme percentages are almost certainly due to the relatively small numbers of children captured by the data. Taken overall, however, the significant feature of this data is the almost consistent percentage of children across Scotland within each category of service with a range of only 5.7% between 30.8% and 36.5%. These figures are also broadly comparable or slightly lower than the national figure for the overall percentage of children assessed as having additional support needs, which was 36.7% in 2023-24.²²⁵

Results from a survey of a sample of schools

In Scotland, the operational responsibility for education rests with its 32 local authorities. They are accountable for translating law and national educational policy into practice. They do this through their schools nearly all of which are in the direct control of local authorities.²²⁶ It therefore follows that, in the first instance, the most accessible picture of the nature of front-end ASN service delivery is obtainable from schools. Accordingly, an email survey was issued to a sample of 30 schools which were known to have a significant armed forces presence within their delineated areas²²⁷. This survey was issued in the summer term of 2023/2024 and elicited 8 returns which was disappointing.

²²⁵ Table 1.5, Pupil Census Supplementary Statistics issued by Scottish Government in March 2024.

²²⁶ Only one mainstream school and 8 special schools are directly funded (grant aided) by the Scottish Government.

²²⁷ “Delineated areas” are often referred to as “catchment areas”.

However, the returns did reflect the main Royal Navy/Royal Marine, Army and RAF base areas with representation from primary and secondary schools. A summary of the extent of the sample is given in Table 27, below.

Table 27: Summary of pupil numbers in sample schools

Total children on school roll	Total children with ASN on school roll	Total armed forces children on school roll	Total armed forces children with additional support needs
3,869	1308	535	169

The figures in Table 27 show that 1308 children, or 33.8%, of the pupil population in the sample have additional support needs, while 31.6% (169 children) of the armed forces pupil population in these schools fall into this category. This compares with 36.7% and 32.1% respectively for the Scottish school population. The pupils in this sample therefore are broadly comparable to the national picture, but with a slightly lower incidence of additional support needs.

Table 28: Service background of all armed forces pupils in sample schools

	Regular	Reserve	Veteran	Mixed	Not Declared
Number, Scotland	4092	1118	6501	487	630
Number, sample	317	22	153	18	17
Percentage, Scotland	31.9	8.7	50.7	3.8	4.9
Percentage, sample	60.2	4.2	29.0	3.4	3.2

The service background of the children in the sample is summarised in Tables 28 and 29. There is over-representation relative to the national picture of children with a regular forces background in both the overall figures for armed forces children and for those having additional support needs. Conversely, veteran's children are under-represented. This is unsurprising since the survey was targeted at those schools serving main base areas, reflecting the focus of this study on mobility. The consequence of this is that the findings of this part of the study cannot be reliably extrapolated to the overall Armed Forces population in Scotland.

Table 29: Service background of armed forces pupils with additional support needs in sample schools

	Regular	Reserve	Veteran	Mixed	Not Declared
Number, Scotland	1262	335	2147	145	230
Number, sample	90	4	62	5	8
Percentage, Scotland	30.6	8.1	52.2	3.5	5.6
Percentage, sample	53.1	2.3	37.0	2.9	4.7

Schools were asked to identify the number of armed forces children who they have assessed as having a particular condition causing them to be identified as having additional support needs. The results are summarised in Table 30 below. The categories of need are the same ones for which the Scottish Government collects and publishes data nationally. Therefore, the information was anticipated to be readily available within the school.

Table 30: The numbers of armed forces children identified with particular conditions in rank order

Dyslexia	33
Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD)	33
Communication support needs	29
English as an additional language (EAL)	21
Interrupted learning	16
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	16
Learning disability	15
Family issues	11
Mental health problems	10
Young carer	9
Physical health problem	6
Conditions for which 5 or fewer children were identified: Hearing impairment, Visual impairment Risk of exclusion, more able pupil, Language or speech disorder, Other moderate learning difficulties, Other specific learning difficulty eg numeric, Physical or motor impairment, Bereavement, Looked after, Substance abuse, Substance abuse.	

Note 1: The numbers of children and numbers of conditions will not be the same as children may have more than one condition.

It will be seen that a number of the conditions reflected in Table 30 which occur most frequently are independent of a family's military status – notably dyslexia, communication support needs, ASD, learning disability and physical health problems. Others, might be related to the armed forces status of the family including SEBD, EAL, interrupted learning, family issues and mental health problems but any definite link is unknown at this level.

**Table 31: Children in Scotland with particular additional support needs in 2023/2024²²⁸
in rank order**

Nature of additional support need	Number of children and young people
Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty (SEBD)	63,078
English as an additional language (EAL)	51,994
Other moderate learning difficulty	31,424
Dyslexia	30,852
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	30,179
Other specific learning difficulty (e.g. numeric)	27,202
Family Issues	26,243
Other	25,653
Language or speech disorder	19,597
Physical health problem	17,538
Communication Support Needs	13,853
Learning disability	11,652
Interrupted learning	11,009
Mental health problem	10,884
Looked after	9,158
Physical or motor impairment	8,294
Young Carer	6,568
Bereavement	5,468
Visual impairment	5,013
Hearing impairment	3,847
More able pupil	2,885
Risk of Exclusion	1,951
Substance Misuse	647
Deafblind	73

Reference to Table 31, shows the national picture of additional support needs for Scotland. Of the 11²²⁹ most frequently occurring conditions in Table 30, seven also occur in the top 11 in Table 31 while 4 do not. This is summarised in Table 32.

²²⁸ Source: Scottish Government: Pupil Census Supplementary Statistics 2023 issued March 2024

²²⁹ "11" has been chosen since the top 11 conditions are those for which data does not have to be suppressed and conditions can therefore be differentiated.

Table 32: Comparison of needs between armed forces and national children's populations

Most frequently occurring conditions for armed forces children also occurring frequently nationally	Most frequently occurring conditions for armed forces children with lower incidence nationally
Social, emotional and behavioural difficulty (SEBD)	Interrupted learning
English as an additional language (EAL)	Learning disability
Dyslexia	Mental health problems
Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	Young carer
Family Issues	
Physical health problem	
Communication Support Needs	

Table 32 shows a considerable overlap in terms of the nature of need between the Armed Forces and national population. This is unsurprising given that the Armed Forces population is drawn from the national population. However, there are some conditions, again shown in Table 32 where, based on this limited evidence, there is a higher-than-expected incidence in the armed forces children's population – interrupted learning, learning disability, mental health problems and young carer. These needs therefore may be particular characteristics of armed forces children. The evidence from this sample, however, is limited to a small set of schools in one particular year. More research is necessary to establish whether this observation has any wider significance or applicability.

Table 33: The frequency of particular ASN conditions rank ordered by branch of service

Key:		Condition rank ordered by branch of service		
ASN condition	Assigned letter	Royal Navy/ Royal Marines	Army	RAF
Hearing impairment	A	G	N	J
Visual impairment	B	O	S	H
Deaf blind	C	J	J	O
Physical or motor impairment	D			
More able pupil	E	P	Q	Q
Bereavement	F	U	A	V
Interrupted learning	G	Q	T	T
Learning disability	H	N	U	W
Looked after	I	E	W	A
Dyslexia	J	S	M	B
Other specific learning difficulty eg numeric	K	R	F	D
Substance abuse	L	B	H	G
Family issues	M	D	L	K
EAL	N	F	P	M
SEBD	O	H	R	N
Young carer	P	A	B	C
ASD	Q	I	C	E
Language or speech disorder	R	W	D	F
Communication support needs	S	X	E	I
Risk of exclusion	T	C	G	L
Mental health problems	U	K	I	P
Other moderate learning difficulties	V	L	K	R
Physical health problem	W	T	V	U
Other	X	V	X	X

Within this general issue of the distinctive needs of armed forces children there is a subsidiary issue of whether there is any variation between the various branches of the service. Deeper analysis of this area of interest is hindered because only one education authority in Scotland identifies whether families have a Royal Navy, Army or Royal Air Force background. However, in this sample schools do serve particular main base areas so it is possible to form an approximate view of service-related needs. Table 33 shows the rank order of particular ASN conditions according to branch of service with the highest rank, assigned to the most frequently occurring conditions. Based on this tabulation it is possible to determine the level of correlation between pairs of services:

Branches of Service	Coefficient of rank correlation
Royal Navy and Royal Marines with Army =	0.90
Royal Navy and Royal Marines with RAF =	0.85
Army with RAF =	0.91

Given that a perfect relationship between two variables would be 1.0 these results show a very high level of correlation between the sets of needs. In other words, statistically, the distribution of needs between services are very similar. However, this is only one result for one year across a relatively small number of schools (8). As has already been pointed out, in many respects the armed forces population is very similar to the general population, therefore a very high degree of correlation would be expected. If the focus is placed on the four conditions identified through Table 32 as being potentially distinctive then the picture shown in Table 34 becomes apparent.

Table 34 shows that for the conditions identified as being over-represented in the armed forces children's population there are some significant differences between the three branches of the service. Thus, interrupted learning and being a young carer appears more important for Royal Navy/Royal Marines families than the Army or RAF. Conversely, learning disability is more important for RAF families than the other services while mental health problems have a higher incidence in the Royal Navy and Army families. Again, however, these apparent differences require further research with larger samples and a longer time base.

Table 34: Rank difference in conditions identified as distinctive to armed forces children

	Rank			Rank difference		
	Royal Navy/ Royal Marines	Army	RAF	Royal Navy/ Royal Marines vs Army	Navy/ Royal Marines vs	Army vs RAF
Interrupted learning	3	20	12	17	9	8
Learning disability	15	12	2	3	13	10
Mental health problems	6	8	23	2	17	15
Young carer	6	15	22	9	16	7
Total rank difference		31	55	40		

The comments offered by schools are also helpful in understanding this association between additional support needs and life in the Armed Forces. Schools were invited to give a professional view on the level of causality that might be attributed between military life and additional support needs. Of the 169 children identified in this part of the survey it was felt that 118 (70%) would have additional support needs whether or not their parents were in the Armed Forces. Only 15 (9%) were thought to have additional support needs as a direct consequence of their parents serving in the Armed Forces. For 36 children (21%) schools felt unable to attribute causality. These expressions of professional opinion reinforce the interpretation of the numerical information provided so far.

That is, the needs of the armed forces children's population do appear to have some distinctive characteristics, but these are only directly attributable to the minority of pupils. It is therefore more helpful to view the generality of armed forces children's needs in the same way as the rest of the pupil population. This observation should not distract professionals from looking at the needs of children at the individual level since some issues perhaps most obviously in the case of interrupted learning and mental health problems may at least partially be found in the nature of their parents' employment.

This realisation is found in the response of schools to meeting the needs of this part of their pupil population. Of the 8 schools responding to this survey 4 (half) stated they had a policy on supporting children's learning which specifically considered armed forces children. The remaining schools stated that they had a policy for supporting children's learning which is generally stated with the assumption that all children's needs will be met, including armed forces children. It was further indicated that the majority of the armed forces pupil population were receiving "universal" support, meaning their needs were being met within the generality of classroom provision for example through adjustments to learning and teaching styles. In addition, it was indicated that some pupils were receiving "targeted" support that is, with some level of additionality. However, the proportion varied between schools. It should be noted that this additionality might well be delivered within a normal classroom setting. Indeed, half of the schools responded by indicating that armed forces children's needs were being met in the classroom within the school's core allocation of resources. This included those where additional staffing such as classroom/teaching assistants or teachers had been allocated to this task. The other 4 responding schools indicated that additional classroom/teaching assistants had been allocated. Of these 2 had received additional teaching staffing. Therefore, irrespective of the source or nature of needs associated with armed forces children, meeting those needs carries an implication for additional resources.

Table 35: Summary of school responses on aspects of transition

Aspect of transition	Summary statement for sample
Efficiency of transfer of records from a pupil's previous school.	No school found this perfect.
The previous school made contact to alert the receiving school to a child's needs.	In the majority of cases this was not happening.
The records supplied contained helpful in assessing children's needs.	While some did find the records to be helpful, an equal number did not.
The records supplied by the previous school were helpful in meeting the child's needs.	While some did find the records to be helpful, an equal number did not.
Receiving schools find it better to conduct our own assessments from scratch.	The same number of schools agreed with this statement as disagreed with it.
Parents are aware of the differences between the Scottish ASN system and those equivalent systems in the rest of the UK.	No school thought that this was the case.
Staff understand the differences between the Scottish ASN system and the equivalents in the rest of the UK.	Most schools believed that this was true.
When a child arrives, their needs are met without delay	Only half of schools believed this was the case

The survey also explored aspects of the management of transition, the summary of which is given in Table 35. The responses from schools reflect a system which is performing sub-optimally. It would be expected that the transfer of information for all children, but particularly those with additional support needs would be seamless. It is only with adequate prior information that planning can allow appropriate strategies and resources to be in place from the first day the child attends their new school. Parents also need to know and understand the provision. Paradoxically all jurisdictions emphasise pre-planning as a characteristic of effective provision of support. This does not appear to be happening with mobile children. Some of the specific comments offered by schools further illuminate some of the issues:

“This process works better within Scotland. The experience from outwith is quite variable.”

“We very rarely hear from schools in England during transfer, we always try to ensure that passports are completed with needs and attainment evidence is documented prior to families leaving us.”

“EHCP Plans (sic) are not always in place for transferring pupils. It would be really useful to have a common transition guidance so all children, irrelevant of school placement, get the same transition experience.”

“Often parents wish to make classing decisions as the academic year in birthday’s works from March 1st in Scotland and September 1st in England. Parents should follow guidance from the school but often wish to class up feeling they might move back to England. However often these pupils are not ready for this and socially and emotionally are behind.”

“Pupils need support with waiting lists and diagnostic processes. By the time an Ed Psych or school has worked with the pupil, they are often moved and this process starts again.”

“All of this data is subject to change with pupils leaving and starting school. Some is diagnosed formally and some is known but not diagnosed.”

The picture is therefore of a disjointed process of variable quality.

This is also having an impact on the children and therefore the schools themselves. Some respondents offered the following additional comments:

“The attainment gap within my school is armed forces pupils. Significant support and intervention is required for a high percentage of these pupils.”

“A small percentage that require support can be non-engagers. This is challenging. We often need to use the support of a Service Pupil Advisor for example to support us in helping families and signposting them to support. They do not always take this.”

“Forces families should be encouraged to attend school. I know leave periods can be challenging for family holidays etc. but missed school does not support us to meet their educational needs.”

In that context, again the concept of some form of additionality was identified as being important, as one respondent observed, *“We have been very lucky to have been successful bidding for Armed Forces funding from the Covenant to support armed forces children with additional support needs.”* Another emphasised access to partner services including educational psychology, social work, Army Welfare Service and the third sector.

Summary

This part of the study emphasised the needs of children whose parents are in regular service and has underemphasised the veteran’s population relative to the national picture. This was deliberate in order to focus on the issues associated with mobility. It also has allowed greater clarity that the “transitions” issues are those associated with geographic moves of school rather than those arising from moving from military to civilian employment. Based on a limited sample of 8 schools the coverage was nevertheless of some 169-armed forces children with additional support needs across Royal Navy, Royal Marine, Army and Royal Air Force backgrounds. For the first time, it was possible to build a picture of the profile of needs within this part of the population.

There is a considerable overlap in the nature of needs between the Armed Forces and national population. However, there are some conditions with a higher than expected incidence in the armed forces children’s population which include interrupted learning, learning disability, mental health problems and being a young carer. The distribution of needs is very similar between the three branches of the Armed Forces although with some different points of emphasis. It is clear that for at least half of this group of children, their needs would exist irrespective of the parents being in the Armed Forces. Of the remainder, the attribution of their needs is more indeterminate. Although there is recognition that some children’s needs (about 9%) are associated with Armed Forces service for many this link is only partial, with them having other needs, or professionals feel unable to identify the link clearly. This is an area requiring further research. This observation does not detract from recognition that irrespective of causality all of this group will be exposed to the same levels of challenge, and opportunity, posed by mobility.

Certainly, schools appear to be managing the issue of meeting needs through generic or specific policies. Again, the picture is that for about half of the schools’ needs are being met through the core allocation of resources to the school, however for the other half additional (external or non-core) resources are needed. This is another area where further research would be helpful.

It is an essential feature of effective educational provision that children should enjoy a seamless, progressive, experience in their learning. This concept is actually enshrined in the legislation where children require additional support which emphasises the need for planning, multi-agency meetings and family engagement at times of transition. The response from schools clearly indicates that this is not working as well as it should, particularly when there are cross-border moves. Lack of parental knowledge of the Scottish education system was identified as a particular area of deficiency, but obstacles to smooth transition such as access to specialist assessments was also identified.

Implications

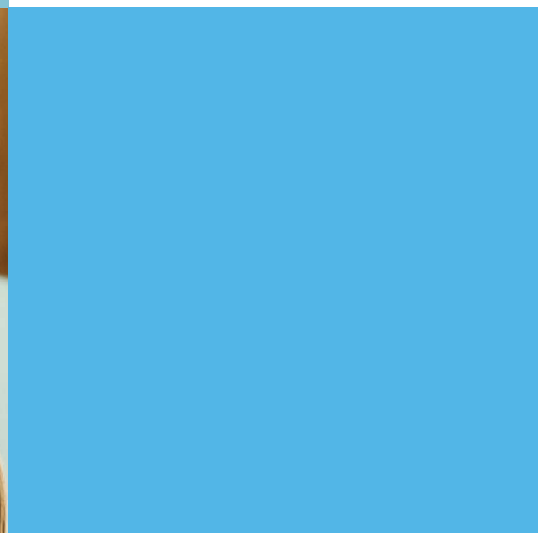
This part of the study applies mainly to regular forces families. To make reliable statements about the general armed forces population a much larger-scale survey is necessary.

The work described here has provided an interesting glimpse into the nature of armed forces children's additional support needs. It directly calls into question that the needs of this group can be safely stereotyped as being associated with military life in the shape, for example, of interrupted learning or mental health problems. Rather the needs are much more similar to the general population than suggested by anecdote. However, there may be particular characteristics of need associated with armed forces children. This recognition forces a requirement that, as set out in the legislation meeting children's needs should operate at the level of the individual child taking fullest account of their personal circumstances.

The evidence from this sample is however limited to a small set of schools in one particular year, and more research is necessary to establish whether this observation has any wider significance or applicability.

It is similarly necessary to conduct more detailed research into how schools, education authorities and allied services such as health are responding to armed forces children's needs to gain a better understanding of what is effective and whether levels of resourcing are adequate.

It is clear that the processes of transition as a consequence of mobility could be significantly improved.



Chapter 8:

The Lived Experience of Children and Families

“My kids went to 13 different schools over the years [name], and you have my sympathies – it’s not easy moving from one end of the country to the other and made all the more difficult because of the difference in curriculum between Scotland and England. Add in a bunch of learning difficulties and you’re not in a great position.”²³⁰
‘Horrific would describe the process as a whole.’ (RAFFF Community Forum)

Results from stakeholder engagement days.

Two professional learning events were organized. One event was held in the north, hosted by Aberdeenshire Council (September 2024), and the other in Edinburgh, at Napier University, Craiglockhart Campus (November 2024). Educators, professionals including Education Scotland and support staff from local authorities and schools attended each day, and discussed sharing practice, information and resources, in the context of this research. Many of those in attendance were members of an armed forces family or had been an armed forces child.

Through workshop activities, discussions and presentations, educators identified the following key points that need to be addressed as being firstly to improve the learning journey of armed forces children and young people, especially those with additional support needs and secondly to help educators in their support of armed forces children and young people, especially those with additional support needs. It was felt there should be a focus on support in establishments to directly impact the learning experience of the child or young person and their family. Particular themes were identified as being worthy of further consideration. Some of these were in themselves clear outcomes while others indicated areas for further investigation as part of the research:

A. Professional learning

- Developing a better understanding of armed forces children and young people and their families.
- Increased awareness of armed forces life.
- A better understanding of frequent mobility, interrupted learning and ASN.
- Knowledge of learning experiences and associated terminology outside Scotland with its implications for transferability and seamless progression in learning.

B. Communication

- Develop relationships with children and young people, parents and families.
- Identify key contacts within establishments and local authorities, with knowledge of, and responsibility for, armed forces families.
- Continue and develop network groups to share good practice.
- In cases of mobility clarity for sending and receiving establishments.
- Timely transfer of information within authorities, Scotland, UK, and overseas.

C. Policies and practices that support the child, family and professionals

- Protected spaces as a response to frequent mobility.
- To limit interrupted learning and mitigate ASN.
- Improved clarity on the alignment of curricula and qualifications.
- To mitigate the effects of separation and loss created by deployments and long-term training; mobility and disrupted social experiences.
- A focus on mental health and wellbeing through developing life skills.
- Developing support systems and locating funding opportunities.
- HMiE inspection to involve knowledgeable inspectors with an understanding of the armed forces community and their life experiences.

Data from school visits: the main messages.

The “Armed Forces Family”

“When dad is away for 6 weeks I don’t like it. I have his photo on my pillow so I can cuddle it. But, its good when he comes back.” (Primary child)

Parents and children offered an insightful view of the reality of family life in the armed forces. This view was shared across the groups interviewed, although there were some nuanced differences. Understanding this view is important as a first step in being better able to support armed forces children with additional support needs.

The picture described was not universally negative. Children were very proud of their parents and the work they were doing. They were able to describe aspects of their parents’ work, including recognition that it could be dangerous. Some had visited their parents’ place of work and met senior officers. Special events like “fun days” were appreciated. As one primary pupil put it, *“My dad’s a cook in the Navy. When he comes home, he makes great meals.”* This aspect of positivity, however, should not be confused with an appreciation of the actual Armed Forces themselves, for which parents and children reserved some severe criticisms, attributing many of the challenges faced by their families to the service as a whole:

“There is no routine. We do not know our parent’s duty times. We do not know dates. As a result we miss milestone family events. We do not know when he is coming back. The parent can be away ... for 200 days. There are unplanned changes of [family] routine.” (Secondary child)

Or,

“[There is] inconsistent understanding and support from Line Managers. ‘People simply don’t care if it is something that doesn’t affect them directly.’”
(RAFF Community Forum)

Across the discussion groups, and as exemplified in the quote above, there was unity in describing the disruptions to family life that are not being experienced by most other families and groups of children. Irrespective of which service arm is being considered it is almost inevitable that at least one of the parents will spend periods away from home due to being on exercise, needing to attend specialist training within or outside the UK, or on operational deployments. It was these periods of separation that were cited as having the major effect on family life with consequent implications for children’s education, particularly those with additional support needs. One parent described this in some detail:

“The stresses for individual children differ according to the length and nature of separations which could be 3 months, 9 months or nil. A specific issue directly impacting on children is uncertainty. A parent can be scheduled to depart on a ship, the family goes through all of the transitions such as saying goodbyes and last outings, then the departure might be delayed for technical or other issues. Conversely, children might see the boat arriving back with the parent, but instead of being reunited dad might be held for up to 48 hours for deck or shore duties postponing the reunion. This uncertainty significantly aggravates family stresses.”
(Primary parent)

These periods of separation could result in:

- The emotional distress for children when the parent left and sometimes re-joined the family.
- One parent having to assume responsibility for all aspects of support to the family including providing transport, maintaining the household, and enforcing the rules of family life. Some found this onerous.
- That “lone parent” responsibility was then potentially inverted when the serving parent returned.
- An older child assuming “alpha male or alpha female” responsibilities for their siblings which then might be reluctantly relinquished on the parent’s return.
- Different family routines between when one parent and both parents were present.
- Another adult, such as a family friend, being temporarily regarded as a parent by the children.

These features of family life are exacerbated by other factors specific to armed forces families:

- Separation from the extended family meaning that there is sometimes only limited access to an additional layer of support and stability offered by grandparents, aunts or uncles.
- For some children the physical separation from the extended family causing an inability to attend major family events was a source of acute distress
- For mobile families, notice of moves being at sometimes short notice, two weeks being the shortest time cited, making it difficult to develop long term family plans, creating uncertainty.
- That feature of armed forces life characterised as “on the buses, off the buses” whereby apparently firm plans are either deferred or advanced at short notice. Families therefore were sometimes going through the rituals of separation only to have them frustrated, or were anticipating a parent’s return to have it postponed.
- Some children and spouses were aware of one parent living with high risks as a consequence of their job.

While many of these features of armed forces’ family life are either obvious, or already known, strong feelings were expressed that they were being insufficiently mitigated. For schools an obvious example would be the admissibility of family holidays to better accommodate the parents’ rhythm of duty. School holidays are not harmonised with the military training or deployment calendars. Some families felt that the opportunity to have a family holiday at the end of a deployment would be helpful to re-establish the family unit. Some parents felt, strongly, that “*You are on your own*” with an absence of support other than from other families. In some locations there was a lack of awareness of sources of advice or support, or this was felt to be ineffective. The support that came from individual, identified, schools was appreciated, however overall, it was felt that there was a lack of understanding in the education system of what it was like to be an armed forces family. A small number of parents had experience of schools which were not in main base areas. Here their children had been the only ones with an armed forces background. In such schools it was felt that staff and other children had a very limited understanding and therefore empathy with armed forces life. Interestingly, there was also a feeling that the senior echelons of the Armed Forces insufficiently understood the conditions of modern service and its impact on families.

A strong feature of discussions was that when there is a separation in the family as a result of service, this can be substantially mitigated if effective communication is possible with the absent parent. Children were able to describe how much they valued regular contact with their parent and found this to be reassuring:

***“It’s difficult when dad goes away. I message him when I can.
He is in different countries and different time zones.” (Primary child)***

Spouses cited it as a way of keeping both parents involved in family decisions including in relation to the child's education. For some categories of employment, most notably in the submarine service, such communication is not possible for operational reasons and, although accepted, it is cited as introducing a level of stress in family life.

Coherence of UK educational systems/ Knowledge of the Scottish System

“The change between different systems brings mayhem.” (Secondary staff)

“There is a huge disconnect from England to Scotland and vice versa. The language is different. There is no obvious system for you to navigate.” (Secondary staff)

The parents and children encountered in the discussion groups fell into one of these categories:

- their experience was entirely in the Scottish educational system;
- although the children had always attended Scottish schools, the parents had been educated elsewhere in the UK;
- parents who were from elsewhere in the UK and whose children had moved to a Scottish school from another jurisdiction; and
- parents and children with an educational experience outside the UK either in a Commonwealth country, Cyprus or Germany.

For those cases where experience was entirely within Scotland there were no problems reported of understanding the overall education system in terms of ages of transition and qualifications and the other structural differences previously noted in chapter 2. However, some of these parents did record issues moving between Scottish education authority areas arising from differences in assessments and procedures. School staff confirmed that systems within Scotland are not completely harmonised and that a child moving from one area to another will experience challenges in continuity of experience.

All other groups of parents recorded difficulties in gaining knowledge of and understanding of the Scottish education system:

“Differences in education systems, school starting ages and additional needs thresholds across the UK can cause challenges for mobile service families and are not always understood.” (RAFF Community Forum)

“The Scottish education is difficult to understand – for example the year stages. There are different subjects: for example maths is compulsory in England until age 18. There is a disjoint in school years and holidays.” (Secondary parent)

As one parent whose experience was completely in another UK jurisdiction described it, *“the Scottish education system came as a total shock”*. Another, Scottish, parent said *“It’s ridiculous. All schools throughout the UK should be doing the same thing.”* Parents noted specific challenges, notably differences in terminology, discontinuities in ages of transition, differences between the Scottish school year and those elsewhere in the UK. These comments were typical:

“Differences in terminology, systems, plans and documentation are all issues when moving across the Border, and to a lesser degree between authorities.” (Primary parent)

“Families who have moved from Scotland have found no awareness of the Scottish education system and its implications, for example the different ages of transition. The curriculum is different even on issues such as mathematics.” (Primary parent)

For parents whose children had more complex additional support needs these wider system differences were aggravated by the differences between jurisdictions particularly in relation to EHCPs in England and educational plans in Scotland. What these differences mean for families is illustrated by these quotations:

“We want to move to England but are not getting any support. My son will need an EHCP, but the process is lengthy and there are difficulties feeding-in the experiences gained in Scotland.” (ELC parent)

“I had no idea about the Scottish education system, and just did not know what I was doing. My 5-year old has complex issues. I needed, and developed, a large support network by being proactive.” (ELC parent)

Sometimes these structural differences, for individual families, were thrown into sharp relief by their experience in another system and how much emotional energy they may have had to invest in having their child’s needs recognised:

“There was an EHCP that the parents had had to fight hard for, then they felt they needed to keep fighting for a CSP which we would not open. For us an EHCP would be equivalent to a Child’s Plan. The parents saw a CSP as a means of securing additional funding which had happened in England with the EHCP, for which they had to fight hard.” (Primary staff)

The interpretation of the impact of differences between jurisdictions is complicated by the variability in practice within each nation. This variability operates at the level of authorities and schools. Parents, for example, within Scotland identified authorities where they had poor experiences and contrasted these with others where they had felt much better supported:

“The English system was completely disregarded – particularly in [named authority] as we were the only family. Here there are lots of [armed forces] people but you still can’t have conversations about qualifications and routes to University.” (Secondary parent)

VIGNETTE: An Early Learning and Childcare Setting

Background

The first contact parents have with the education system will be in an early learning and childcare setting, often referred to as “nursery” and intended for children younger than statutory school age. These may be run by the local authority either as a separate establishment or as a “class” attached to, or associated with a primary school. Other provision may be through a “partner provider” receiving funding from the local authority, or may be totally separate. In Scotland, children in this stage of their education benefit from play-based experiences in the Curriculum for Excellence Early Level. It is recognised that some children may require additional support at this age, or younger.

Parents using early learning and childcare are just coming to terms with parenthood, learning about their own children and about how educational services support their learning. They may also be coming to terms with armed forces life with the impact of family separation and living as part of a military community with its own identity and values. Mobile parents may face the unexpected challenge of learning about the Scottish education system which some described as being “a total shock”.

Parents interviewed identified specific challenges all of which had more prominence for those whose children had additional support needs, which were:

- understanding the implications of differences between “early level” in Scotland and the reception classes found elsewhere in the UK;
- the emphasis on play at this level in Scotland compared to literacy and numeracy elsewhere;
- the effects on their child moving between systems where they were seen to be either “behind”, or “ahead” of their peers according to the direction of the move;
- the perception of differences in entitlements to support across the UK at this stage of their child’s life; and
- young parents, particularly mothers, feeling isolated with a perceived absence of advice and support.

One early learning and childcare setting had responded to these challenges in a number of positive ways. This setting was familiar and accessible, being sited amongst an area of dedicated military housing in adapted accommodation with additional, bespoke, facilities in a small area of grounds. In a recent Care Inspectorate report the setting had received 8 “very good” gradings, with the inspectors observing, *“Due to their own life experiences, staff were aware of the specific difficulties experienced by military families and were able to support them, for example when a parent was deployed abroad or when a new baby was born.”*

The manager of the centre, as a military spouse with experience of mobility, had deep and personal insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the families using the centre. This extended to a detailed knowledge of the practical details of the implications of family separation as a consequence of military duty and the absence of extended family support. It was underpinned by an understanding of the tensions in family life that may emerge with their impact on the children and their needs. This natural empathy was important in winning the support of parents and ensuring that provision was directly related to the needs of families and children. The provision of authoritative advice directly related to each family’s situation was particularly important and inspired confidence. The time taken to explain educational provision and relate it to each family’s circumstances was particularly important.

Amplification of additional support needs

“These stresses in family life can amplify additional support needs. The child’s school life suffers when dad is away. Sleep and morale suffer due to anxiety and stress with knock-on effects.” (Primary parent)

In discussions, educators were surprised by the finding of this research that the incidence of additional support needs, discussed chapter 7, is lower than in the rest of the pupil population. They were also surprised that the nature of needs between the Armed Forces and overall groups were largely similar. This appeared to conflict with their own professional experience. Further discussion, however elicited the concept that the needs of children with an armed forces background were being amplified by their situation. Thus, the example was given of neuro-divergent children who tend to prefer routine and stability, but this is not their experience as a consequence of armed forces life. Mobility takes them between different learning experiences when they move as found in curricula (what is taught) and pedagogy (how it is taught).

“[A] service family highlighted the change in curriculum and change in year groups make it difficult to move back and forwards between [devolved administrations and England]. ‘I would not have moved if I had realised we wouldn’t be able to move back due to the differences in education.’” (RAFFF Community Forum)

The actual impact of this was well explained by one teacher:

“Amplification [of additional support needs] is a result of gaps in children’s knowledge; separation in families, including the extended family exacerbating issues; the support systems in England are significantly different to Scotland; and if the child is missed then they are not getting support early in their learner journey, making any difficulty worse in later life.” (Secondary staff)

It is also a consequence of the disrupted family life caused by deployments and training obligations, and the instabilities resulting from other features of living such as the absence of a nearby extended family. Children with social and behavioural difficulties were being exposed to varying home environments as adults, and or siblings, exchanged lead roles in the family with changes in behavioural expectations and how these were applied:

“ASN is amplified by: the disruption to family life where hierarchy might be defined by “Whoever is in charge of the remote control”; failure to diagnose and make provision for ASN as a result of mobility; and the lack of the extended family support structure.” (Secondary staff)

These situations were further aggravated by some of the other discontinuities such as those in either the availability of support between areas or loss of place on waiting lists, discussed below. These effects were very clearly described by parents themselves. Parents and educators alike therefore agreed that one of the main presenting issues was about how armed forces life may not actually give rise to an additional support need in a particular child, but may substantially amplify an existing need. A better understanding of this effect is required.

Transfer of records

For parents and practitioners alike, one of the most prominent issues raised in discussions was that of transfer of pupil records between schools:

“If information comes from south of the border, the quality can be very variable and can take a while to arrive. The parents are important. If they are used to moving, the information they provide can work well.” (Secondary staff)

“Delays to reports and schoolwork being shared between schools [was] highlighted in some instances, potentially impacting on placement in year group when transferring into another nation and repetition of learning.” (RAFF Community Forum)

This should not be seen as an issue restricted to transfers between jurisdictions. Indeed, specific examples were cited of transfer information within Scotland, even between contiguous authorities. All Scottish local authorities use the same management information system, SEEMIS. The common use of this system facilitates the electronic transfer of information between schools in Scotland. This feature of provision was appreciated. However, participants pointed to differences in policy between authorities which meant that information available in one authority was not transferrable to some other Scottish authorities. Some specific comments included:

“The transfer of records is poor even within Scotland.” (Primary staff)

“The transfer of records is very variable even within Scotland. Local authorities make varying use of SEEMIS, for example [named authority] do not use the wellbeing app so any information transferred to that authority is unavailable to their schools. Differences in policy, procedures and interests vary.” (Primary staff)

“There are different teaching systems in Scotland. We may have to make phone calls [to understand needs]. It helps if they are using GIRFEC, but there are even differences within [our own authority].” (Primary staff)

The much bigger issue, unsurprisingly, was the transfer of pupil information between UK jurisdictions. This was characterised as *“just not working”*. Examples were cited where reliance had to be placed on parents providing information to the receiving school. As one school stated *“we have to take what parents tell us at face value”*. One parent gave the example of it taking 5 years for their child’s records to be transferred from a school elsewhere in the UK. In the absence of a formal exchange of information some schools were seeking to mitigate the issue by use of telephone calls to the sending schools.

A specific practical issue impeding the exchange of information and the initiation of appropriate planning systems was the difficulty parents experienced in establishing a dialogue with the receiving area and identifying the destination school. This was a source of some considerable frustration:

“We have to move to England. My child needs an EHCP but they won’t speak to me until I move and have an address. [Named authority] have no idea about Scottish education. I can’t get my son into school.” (Secondary parent)

“We don’t know what school a child is going to and the issues of access to schools. There are problems of transfer of information, and what the recommendations of the previous school are. There is no consideration from the English schools.” (Primary staff)

A specific issue cited by some schools was that it was unclear as to who had the responsibility for initiating the transfer of information: the sending school, or the receiving school. As one member of staff explained:

“The responsibilities for inter-school liaison are not clearly enough defined. Is it my job to talk to the other school?” (Primary staff)

Even where systems exist for the transfer of information exist they may not be very effective. As one teacher described:

“One child moved to [named English authority]. We were sent a form to complete which asked only 5 questions all of which were focused on the child’s behaviour, not their neuro-divergency or their additional support needs.” (Primary staff)

This very clear issue of transfer of records appeared to lie at the heart of the challenges faced by families and schools alike. Yet as a very practical matter it also, on the face of it, would also to be one of the issues that might most easily be fixed, thereby improving the provision for this group of children and young people.

Translation of records

“For ASN children, the major issue is the transfer of information and the problems that come from the systems being different. There are issues of language, different procedures and different assessments. This problem even exists with neighbouring authorities such as [named Scottish authority].” (Primary staff)

“There is no shared language for ASN etc and this is a big disadvantage”. (Primary staff)

Associated with the physical transfer of information, schools identified the translation of information as an issue. In other words, when any information arrives it may not be easily usable to the benefit of the pupil. This originates mainly from differences between the education systems most obviously in nomenclature but also in terms of processes, procedures and the content of documentation. Differences were also noted in the entitlements to support, and definitions of additional need throughout the UK. However, parents and teachers also noted that differences in policy and procedures between authorities and schools within a jurisdiction, including Scotland, could be an obstacle.

Staff participants recognised that professionals have insufficient knowledge and understanding of education provision in other jurisdictions. This was brought into sharpest focus by those participants who have actually worked in more than one jurisdiction. As one such participant described it *“Scottish teachers have little understanding of the English system; but teachers in England have absolutely no awareness of education in Scotland.”* In the absence of any established system to help schools or parents to navigate the issues it was observed that difficulties would continue. The limited professional understanding across borders was recognised as ultimately inhibiting the usefulness of any information that was transferred as part of child’s records.

Assessments and waiting lists

“Some Service families (SFs) reported having to restart processes following relocation due to differences in NHS and Local Authority (LA) systems. SFs highlighted waiting list times can be longer than assignments. Due to long waiting lists, some SFs are paying for private assessments.”
(RAFF Community Forum)

This part of the discussion is also related to transfer and translation of records. Staff expressed the view that the apparent under-representation of armed forces children within the additional support needs statistics, as identified earlier in this report, could be a product of delays in assessment as illustrated in the comment below:

“With frequent moves children slip through cracks and have incomplete assessments. Waiting lists are interrupted so things start again.” (Secondary staff)

It was argued that children arriving at a school without records or existing assessments might initially go unnoticed. However, as the child’s needs became apparent, they might pass out of the school before any assessment was completed or formalised. This means, of course, that the child would then go on to another school without a formal identification. This viewpoint coming from establishment-based interviews was corroborated:

“For SFs with regular relocations, it can be challenging to have a child’s needs identified and appropriate provision put in place to support the child in a timely manner.” (RAFF Community Forum)

It was beyond the scope of this research to test this opinion, which nonetheless stands as an important observation.

Parents specifically identified waiting lists as an issue. It was also recorded that while policies exist locally for children to not lose their place on a waiting list for health, or other, assessments this was not necessarily being realised in practice:

“Locally there is an established protocol that if an incoming child was on a waiting list they will join the local list at the point they left. This agreement sometimes does not work in practice and does not necessarily happen.” (Primary staff)

Certainly, the account given by parents and schools was that of following a move any previous assessment would either be disregarded or new assessments would be initiated. The effects of these discontinuities could impact on families and their relationship with professionals:

“One child has ADHD/ASD. The family had fought in England for support. We needed to work with the family. The boy was eventually seen by CAMHS. This impacted on trust and the school’s relationship with the family. Transition was challenging and stressful. The child needed a specialist placement. It was a big burden on the family.” (Primary staff)

These delays in assessment may create time delays in meeting needs. For some parents this discontinuity in provision was sufficient for them to contemplate home education, particularly if they perceived their child required “one-to-one support”.

“Some service families feel forced into home education due to a lack of support for children with autism. They highlighted the subsequent impact this can have on employment for serving and non-serving parents/carers.” (RAFF Community Forum)

Continuity

As families move they are also faced with other discontinuities which are not obvious and are not directly related to the larger-scale system differences. Secondary-aged children identified the differences in the school year between Scotland and the rest of the UK as a problem. Some had entered a Scottish school in September, aligned to the English school year, only to find their classmates had started their new timetables in late May or early June. They had therefore to catch up at least a month’s work to be at the same stage as their classmates:

“One major issue is that Scottish schools change their timetable before the summer holidays. This does not happen in England. So a lot of classwork is needed to catch up with peers because I started in August.” (Secondary child)

While the timetable difference is a very practical matter, children also reported discontinuities in their actual experience of learning and teaching:

“The difference in academic standards between the Scottish and English qualifications is a problem for example Nationals are easier than GCSEs, Highers are certainly easier than A levels, but Advanced Higher is harder.”
(Secondary child)

“At primary child school level when I arrived [in Scotland] I was ahead of my classmates but am now behind my English friends.” (Secondary child)

Even within Scotland some of the differences in practice between areas was recognised as creating challenges that parents found difficult to understand:

“The system in [named Scottish authority] was completely different. The whole system was different when we thought it would be the same. There was a discontinuity in care planning. Our questions went unanswered.”
(Primary parent)

Some of the issues might have been mitigated by more efficient transfer of records in an understandable form. However, the aggregate result for some families was sufficient to consider alternatives to state education either in boarding schools, including Queen Victoria School Dunblane, or using home education.

“Some service families are opting for independent school if they feel the school can support their needs better e.g. with smaller class sizes. [The] Financial impact on service families [was] highlighted.” (RAFF Community Forum)

These alternatives would give a stability and continuity that was not available to children experiencing mobility. Clearly, where armed forces families were settled in a base area with little mobility this was much less of a consideration, although they were coping with other aspects of military life. The experience of this latter group, in specific relation to continuity, was very similar to the civilian population.

Pupil passports

As a means of overcoming some of these challenges associated with mobility some professionals and parents suggested that a “passport” should be developed for children. It should be noted that this is not a new idea and various formats for such a document have been suggested in the past. These suggestions have foundered on difficulties in developing acceptable terminology across the UK’s education systems. One secondary school teacher suggested that such a document could be made more acceptable across jurisdictions by avoiding levels of detail in which differences in terminology or approaches would become an obstacle. It was suggested that such a document would focus mainly on a description of the child’s needs and the strategies used to meet those needs.

There certainly appears to be support for such a document with comments including:

“A passport focused on needs and strategies would be very valuable. It should be simple.” (ELC)

“A passport would be good. But the school needs to keep it up. Things do get missed. There should be a standardised process.” (Primary parent)

“A passport would be a good idea, but it needs to focus on needs and strategies, not vocabulary.” (Secondary staff)

“The practice often needs to be in advance of the paperwork. There is a heavy reliance on parents. A passport with strengths and needs would help as would a chronology.” (Secondary staff)

Pupil placement

Families and some professionals reported issues in children being allocated a place in a school. Although mainly reported in relation to England this was also reported as being a problem in some parts of Scotland:

“Transition could be easier. Parents have to phone schools. There should be an automatic space in schools. We have real concerns about the mechanics of pupil placement.” (Primary parent)

“There are problems of getting children into schools in England.” (Primary parent)

These difficulties of pupil placement were independent of a child’s additional support needs, being a more general issue. However, the inability to identify which school they would attend could introduce an element of stress which might be particularly important if, for example, an autistic spectrum disorder was involved.

“Some SFs reported a lack of communication and delay in accessing appropriate school places when relocating. Challenges with accessing appropriate school places resulting in some service children spending time out of education. One SF highlighted their child has not attended school for over 2 years as the mainstream school cannot meet their needs.” (RAFF Community Forum)

For families coming into Scotland: the issue was in being able to identify the child’s school without actually having an address. Not knowing the child’s school meant that it was impossible to establish an early dialogue or for records to be transferred to enable planning for this next stage in the learner’s journey. In some areas a protocol had been agreed where the address of army welfare office could be used for purposes of correspondence. It was stated, however, that actual placement would only be confirmed once a residential address was known. One headteacher observed that more flexibility was needed to allow enrolments. Children cited the disruption to family and school life that resulted from short notice movements with examples given of being taken out of school to help the family pack boxes.

For families moving from Scotland: the position was summarised by one parent, *“We have to move to England. My child needs an EHCP but they won’t speak to me until I move and have an address. [Named English authority] have no idea about Scottish education. I can’t get my son into school.”* This example was not unique. Other parents gave similar examples of their own, or friends’ experience. In these, a move had occurred but the parent had been unable to get their child into a local school, or had, on their own behalf, to contact schools distant from the home.

Relationships with other children and young people

“Friendships are broken with every move. Because of my dad’s absence my friends thought he was in prison.” (Secondary child)

The children and young people described very positive relationships with their peer group in the wider community. Some instances of bullying were reported, but these were untypical and localised. Although armed forces children had a definite sense of identity, sometimes against their own wishes, they all thought of themselves as part of a wider group of young people. They were keen not to be seen as a separate community identified, for example by a particular housing area, so that their friends could easily visit. Some expressed a desire for their peers to have a deepened understanding of what it was like to be an armed forces child, as one secondary aged pupil put it:

“It would help if other children knew more about what it was like to be an armed forces child – for example the importance of the Two-Minute silence, and what a deployment means to us.” (Secondary child)

Another young person described a specific situation in which she thought her father’s life was at risk and observed *“other children and teachers need to know what it’s like to live with that.”*

This ability to make friends with their peers had a consequence for mobile children. Every move was associated with the need to break old relationships and make new ones.

“Making and breaking friendships is difficult. It helps if others are from an Army background as they understand.” (Secondary child)

For some this was unproblematic and seen as either routine or just “part of life”. Others did see it as an issue and wished to maintain friendships after leaving a school. Social media were being used by some to mitigate this issue.

Resourcing

Parents and schools shared concerns about the resources available to armed forces children with additional support needs. Those parents with experience of mobility pointed to differences in the allocation of resources between UK jurisdictions, but also between authorities. One of the most obvious differences highlighted was the absence of the service pupil premium in Scotland with no obvious substitute:

“There about 220 declared AF children in the school, but this is felt to be a low estimate with up to 25% more due to non-declarations particularly amongst veterans. The absence of service pupil premium is an inhibitor as parents can see no point in making a declaration. Parents don’t see any difference as a result of declaration.” (Secondary staff)

Some parents were seeking specialised or individualised support for their child but may have been doing so independent of their armed forces status:

“Our oldest child is autistic. It was horrendous. We were fighting for support. [named school] gave support but then the funding disappeared so support was withdrawn.” (Primary parent)

There was a definite perception from parents and schools that the level of need in armed forces children as a result of deployment, the exigencies of forces’ family life, and mobility merited additional resourcing but this was not present in Scotland:

“We should have additional funding for armed forces children to realise the Covenant.” (Primary staff)

As one headteacher put it, *“Armed forces families have a tough gig.”* The one identifiable source of additionality was recognised as coming from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust. The grant allocations made were very welcome. However, the grant application process was seen as onerous with no guarantee of longer-term sustainability. For school staff therefore reliance on this source, however welcome, was seen as unsatisfactory as being unreliable and not strategic.

Some schools had managed to recruit staff who had an armed forces background either through their own service or as the spouses of serving personnel. Children and parents were particularly appreciative of these members of staff who were perceived as having a natural empathy based on their first-hand experience of armed forces life. Other colleagues, no matter how caring, could not match this experience. Schools that had such members of staff felt in a much stronger position to support families.

“Some teachers do not understand what we are talking about. The best teachers are those who had a military background, as they do understand...” Teachers get it, if they have had the experience.” (Secondary child)

“It would help if schools had someone with an armed forces background.” (Secondary parent)

There are some bespoke resources available. One secondary school in the sample had produced a video describing what life was like for armed forces children. It is of excellent quality and had been co-produced with the young people themselves with parental involvement. The school had found the process of production to be really helpful as a visible demonstration to the community of their commitment to this area of support. This video forms an outstanding resource for discussions with staff, parents, children and young people for any school.

Career long professional learning (CLPL)

All stakeholders argued that there was something unique about armed forces children which came from the interruptions in their learning, the differences in their family life and the impact of deployment:

“We don’t think schools understand us at all – they don’t know the detail such as the changing attitudes of children through the deployment cycle. We need time before dad’s go off.” (Primary parent)

“Schools need an understanding of military life and ASN. Families need to explain it to schools as they are not immediately aware of how best to provide support. Schools need better training.” (Primary parent)

“Schools need to know about these sources of family pressure and could be more prepared for it for example if father is expected home but does not arrive.” (Primary parent)

Some colleagues expressed a desire for a central resource to be produced that would be of direct assistance to schools in gaining a better understanding of how to improve provision for this group of children and young people. It was pointed out by staff that practice tended to develop in response to the needs encountered in the schools themselves rather than through any centralised provision:

“This is within the staff’s career long professional learning; there has been a lot of learning.” (Primary staff)

Schools, individually, were, able to describe a range of practices they had developed in response to their needs. Colleagues coming into schools with a high proportion of armed forces children described being shocked by the level of additional support needs. It was pointed out that initial teacher education on additional support needs was limited in scope and that certainly the implications for armed forces or other mobile families was not covered.

***“There is generally insufficient attention to ASN in initial teacher training.”
(Primary staff)***

This gap was not redressed in any overall programme of career long professional learning opportunities, although there are occasional opportunities to share experiences through national “good practice” events which are organised occasionally:

***“It is a specialist area requiring specialist experience and expertise...
No CLPL is provided for teachers.” (Primary staff)***

A specific aspect of CLPL that emerged in discussions was the need for educators to gain a better insight into the workings of the other UK systems. This would better equip them to interpret information from elsewhere and to provide better advice to families and young people:

“Scotland does not understand enough about England; but we do at least know it is different.” (Secondary staff)

***“We do not know enough about what is happening down south.” (Primary staff)
and “We need to learn more about systems down south.” (Secondary staff)***

Where this has happened it has been found to be valuable and well-received. For example, the Dandelion Project in Moray had, also, contributed directly to the training of newly qualified teachers in that authority in addition to an event held in Oxford in 2024 where some insight was provided into education in Scotland. The work of Military Liaison Group in Highland Council and the support network established by Argyll and Bute Council have been similarly valuable. These projects have also contributed to exchanges of good practice through the ADES national networks.

VIGNETTE: Supporting Armed Forces Families through the Dandelion Project

In 2023, The Moray Council launched the Dandelion Project, a pioneering initiative funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to support families with military backgrounds in the Moray area. Stemming from longstanding ties between the council and the local military bases at Lossiemouth (RAF) and Kinloss (Army), the project emerged in response to growing recognition of the unique needs of armed forces families, particularly children transitioning into new school environments.

The project's foundational work involved extensive community engagement—mapping the experiences of families, schools, and charities—to shape a responsive framework. This led to the development of three core initiatives: a comprehensive resource hub hosted on the Moray Council website, professional learning opportunities for school staff, and the creation of an Armed Forces Friendly Schools award.

Fifteen schools have engaged with the project to date, supported by a network of school-based advocates. These advocates act as key points of contact, helping embed awareness and best practices within their institutions. There were specific challenges faced by project staff, including:

- Varied levels of school engagement due to competing curricular priorities.
- Inconsistent access to or uptake of funding opportunities by schools.
- Concerns around long-term sustainability and integration into institutional practice.

Despite facing these, the project has made significant strides, including the integration of project news into school newsletters and the rollout of child-friendly activities such as a local teddy trail and creative workshops in partnership with Never Such Innocence.

Looking forward, the Dandelion Project seeks to embed its practices more deeply into school culture, extend its reach to other potentially vulnerable groups such as refugee families, and establish a long-term evaluation mechanism. It has become an active contributor to career long professional learning events in Scotland and the UK disseminating its good practice. The project exemplifies how targeted, locally driven interventions can foster inclusion and resilience in educational communities.

Advice and support

“The only support we got in moving to Scotland was a phone call and one sheet of paper. We muddled through. The schools rang each other. There was no transfer of records.” (Primary parent)

“More guidance is needed to support SFs returning from overseas and moving between the nations of the UK.” (RAFF Community Forum)

There was a prevailing need for advice and support amongst families. This need originated on the one hand through an acknowledged lack of knowledge about education, as illustrated in this quotation:

“We don’t understand the education system. We need an information officer who is a specialist in education. Not many people know what to do. We need information on the move to Scotland. The officer should not just employed by the Army. It needs to be marketed. They need to be experienced and practical.” (ELC parent)

For others, however, it was about more general family support related to aspects of armed forces life:

“There is a need for consistent family support. Even stable families can be destabilised by the effects of separation. Families feel “forgotten about” by both local authorities and the Royal Navy.” (Primary parent)

“Young mums can feel very isolated – from a strange area, no extended family, partner often away, no obvious source of advice.” (ELC staff)

With this background a conflicted view of the available advice and support was presented. For some there was a total absence of effective advice and support:

“The Army is not interested in families. We have to fight all of the time. The response to queries related to children sitting examinations and the need not to disrupt this was “nothing to do with us.” The AWS have a “fob-off” attitude. There are inconsistencies of staff.” (Primary parent)

“The Army takes no interest in your move.” (Secondary parent)

For others who were proactive there were too many sources of information available and the landscape required to be streamlined. These differences in perception, to some degree, were related to the location and arm of the service in which the parents found themselves. This paradoxical position is illustrated by the levels of awareness of the support provided by the Ministry of Defence’s own Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS). One group of parents were unaware of the existence of this agency, while another was highly appreciative of the support that had been provided.

The welfare services organic to the Armed Forces were regarded at best as patchy and people-dependent.

“We of course went to all our welfare agencies on camp, the Hive, HR, Community support and SSAFA. All were sympathetic but none could advise me on how to fight for my child rights to an education and mental help support. To say we felt isolated and terrified is an understatement.” (RAFFF Community Forum)

“In [named area] there is a wide range of support services: [named] charities, support workers. But, it is knowing that they are there. Charities that are based in England do not understand the Scottish context and “what we are dealing with up here”. (Primary parent)

One group of parents were of the view that the military welfare service was “*only interested in disasters*” and lacked any knowledge of or interest in education to the point of being unable to signpost to alternative sources of advice. This was criticism that some parents extended to the chain of command:

“[There is] inconsistent understanding and support from line managers. ‘People simply don’t care if it is something that doesn’t affect them directly.’ ‘It is not acceptable to rely on charities and volunteers to support military families. That responsibility lies with our senior leadership team and them alone. They must model inclusion in all we do for all families and serving persons.’” (RAFFF Community Forum)

A number of parents explained, “*The main source of advice is the other armed forces families.*” and described filling the advice gap through networking between families in their own community. However welcome, this approach risks advice not being authoritative.

The challenge in sourcing advice in advance of a move, as distinct from after it, was identified by parents as a difficulty. Some of the written resources available were felt to be inaccessible and difficult to interpret.

Mitigations

Many of the children spoke very positively of their educational experience. Educational staff also highlighted the children's resilience and the broad experience they brought to their learning. However, across participants there was universal recognition of the challenges that might be faced by armed forces children. All of the parents were aware of the situation of their children and described how they responded to periods of family separation and the decisions faced as a family. At the highest level this involved looking at the advantages and disadvantages of the various educational options including fighting for additionality in the present school, opting for unaccompanied postings, boarding school and home education. Families had also developed a number of techniques to support their children at particular points such as family outings in advance of a departure, a long weekend break upon a return, telephone or messaging contact during absence, or creation of a special artefact to remind the child of the missing parent. It was stated that these strategies were developed independently without advice or external support. Participants were able to identify a number of measures that were particularly valued to mitigate the effects of armed forces life which included:

- fun days or special events on the military base;
- community events;
- family support staff or forums;
- visits to schools in advance of a move;
- buddying and mentoring by other pupils;
- use of social media to conserve friendships after a move; and
- support from third sector organisations.

VIGNETTE: VETERANS families

Background

“My vision is for a Scotland where the contributions and sacrifices made by veterans and their families are recognised and appreciated, and where all veterans feel valued by society.”⁷¹ (Scottish Veterans Commissioner)

All local authorities within Scotland have children and young people of armed forces veterans’ families enrolled in their ELC settings and schools. Over half of the children identified in the ADES Data Collection Exercise 2024 (Armed Forces Families Indicator)² are from veterans’ families. Of the 13,111 children and young people of armed forces families identified (Regular, Reserve and Veteran) 53.5% are from veterans’ families. Identification as an ‘armed forces family’ is optional for parents and it is likely that there are substantially more than 13,500 armed forces children in Scotland. It is therefore likely that veterans’ children are similarly underrepresented. Veterans’ families are identified in significant numbers in many local authorities that do not have any visible military presence such as a camp, station, or base. In particular, significant numbers of veterans’ families are located in the central belt and border authorities.

Parents interviewed identified specific barriers for their children in local schools, especially those whose children had additional support needs:

- Moving to a new area without military framework is challenging with housing issues, NHS waiting lists, and access to schools and Early Learning and Childcare Centre.
- Communities can be insular. It takes a while to settle and adjust to new cultural differences such as rural/urban, regional, and military vs civilian. Not all the facilities needed are readily available.
- An awareness that illness or injury because of service may affect a veteran, and impact on their family and children in a way that affects school experiences and the learning journey.

Young people spoke positively about the connections that their veteran parent maintained with their service community. This relationship was explained as important to the veteran as a ‘support group’ and a ‘safe place’ where common experiences and memories could be shared. It was also seen as an area that was not available to the family and children, affecting their sense of identity and belonging.

Being identified as a child of a veteran family was seen as relating to the previous service role of the parent, without any identified place for the child. In contrast, being the child of a serving armed forces parent was more inclusive, where the child was part of the recognised armed forces family. The lack of extended family living nearby providing a supportive network was also seen as a challenge.

The sense of ‘lacking extended support’ was also mentioned in relation to having a parent in the Reserves. When the serving person was deployed, the wider community had no awareness or understanding of the impact on the family unit. Pride in a parent who prioritises their commitment to service was clear in comments made, but there was also an awareness that this commitment can have an impact on family life. For example, family holidays cannot always be taken together due to time used for Reserves.

Educational staff identified the following areas that merit further attention and study.

- A general lack of awareness about armed forces families and their lived experiences.
- Response to families’ needs should be proactive rather than reactive.
- Some reluctance by families to identify as veteran/Ex-service
- Useful to have a chronology of moves/schools, to develop a picture of a child’s learning journey
- GIRFEC staff should know children and families, and their backstory.

Recommendation: To enable a focus on veterans’ families there needs to be resource materials available. Perhaps a dedicated package and someone available for conversations who is ‘Service experienced’.

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)

GIRFEC is a fundamental aspect of Scottish educational provision. It is an entitlement for all children and as much as an approach or methodology based on multi-disciplinary working it is a promise. Against this background some of the comments were stark:

“GIRFEC is not working, or it depends on the school. Provision should be immediate. Moving between schools –we wouldn’t ever do it if it could be avoided. In [named location], the school said they could not support our child. We would consider home schooling.” (Primary parent)

“We are not meeting these children’s needs.” (Secondary staff)

“We are not ‘getting it right’.” (Primary staff)

Participants pointed out that armed forces families may struggle with social integration in new communities, particularly if they are among a minority group within the local population. This can impact their children’s ability to make friends and adapt socially in new schools. The frequent moves associated with military life can lead to emotional and psychological challenges for children, particularly those who thrive on routine and stability. The unpredictability of a parent’s deployment can further complicate their adjustment to new educational environments. The support for children’s emotional well-being was identified as a general issue, however, these matters were seen as being particularly acute for neurodivergent children. With these factors in mind it was felt by some that the aspirations of GIRFEC were not being realised for armed forces children with additional support needs.

It is therefore difficult to disagree with the conclusions reached in an earlier report which also looked at the lived experience of armed forces children and young people:

“It is vital that children do not lose additional support when they move between areas, whether that be SEND support, health treatment including CAMHS, or support from children’s services. These services need to move with the child. Service children should not experience disruption to their support due to MOD relocation (including their place on a waiting list). Greater action is, therefore, needed on the transfer of support when children move between local authorities and devolved nations.”²³²

The conclusions reached as a result of discussions in one forum therefore appear very relevant in ensuring the aspirations of GIRFEC are at least addressed:

- *Enable collaboration between Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, Devolved Administrations and MOD to remove disadvantage for armed forces families who move across county and country borders on assignment, often with little choice or notice.*
- *Develop a formal training programme to be made available to teaching staff and those involved in the additional needs systems to raise awareness of the needs of children and young people from an armed forces background with additional needs and the challenges they may face because of the demands of armed forces life.*
- *Ensure policies and practice pay due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant to ensure Service personnel and families are treated fairly and not disadvantages as a result of military life.” (RAFF Community Forum)*

Alternatives

Given this range of experiences, families were often faced with some difficult decisions not faced by most other families. For some, operational deployments forced periods of family separation were an unavoidable feature of armed forces life that needed to be accepted as being *“just part of the job”* as one parent put it. Even in these circumstances there might be different levels of mitigation. For example children were able to describe regular or occasional video contacts during these periods. There were some circumstances where even this was not possible.

Beyond these separations caused by deployment cases were cited where a parent had to attend a career-related course that could be of 9-months or more duration. Others cited postings to another base that was far enough away to require absence from the home during weekdays, but not so far that weekends could be spent as a family. In these circumstances families were faced with the decision of whether to stay as a family unit and move, sometimes temporarily, or to keep the children in their present school but sacrifice an aspect of family life. Other families had to consider the implications of moving, associated with a new posting. Here the issue might be the degree to which this would disrupt their child's education perhaps at a critical stage such as external examinations. That decision could also be influenced by their experience of education, including the level of satisfaction with the current school, or the degree to which they had had to fight for a particular resource or provision:

“Concerns raised regarding EHCP (Education Health and Care Plan) reflecting and responding to service children's current needs. Service families reported EHCP reviews were not completed on time. Service families have withdrawn the service child from school and are electively home educating now. Until the service family get reassurance that the service child's needs will be met, they are not going to put the service child back into school.” (RAFF Community Forum)

For families in any of these positions a possible solution was offered by consideration of using alternatives to local authority schools: education at home, Queen Victoria School Dunblane, or boarding school. A small number of families included in this survey were either considering these options or had considered them. Sometimes children spoke of the attendance of siblings at Queen Victoria School and that their parents were considering this for their own situation. One family in particular cited what they saw as the advantages of Queen Victoria School in providing better continuity for their child and cited the school fees as being a price they were prepared to pay. These fees are much lower than for private sector boarding schools, but for some families this is still an option:

“Some service families [are] opting for independent school if they feel the school can support their needs better e.g. with smaller class sizes. [The] financial impact on service families [was] highlighted.” (RAFF Community Forum)

“Some service families choose to use boarding schools as this is the only way they feel they can provide continuity and ensure that special needs can be met. It has been highlighted to the RAF Families Federation that this is becoming increasingly difficult to finance with increased schooling costs and the potential additional costs if VAT is added to school fees. SF using boarding option highlighted they are uncertain whether there is appropriate special needs support if they left boarding school, resulting in them feeling they must continue with this route.” (RAFF Community Forum)

VIGNETTE: Life and Learning at Queen Victoria School – A Community of Shared Experience

Discussions with pupils and parents in local authority schools showed that many families were considering or had considered placement at Queen Victoria School as a way of addressing many of the challenges associated with the disruptions to education which can be a part of military life.

Queen Victoria School (QVS) is a state boarding school for children of armed forces personnel. It offers a distinctive educational environment shaped by the realities of military life. Insights from pupils, parents, educators, and pastoral staff highlight how the school's routines, relationships, and support structures foster resilience and community among its students.

Pupils described a highly structured schedule that includes early mornings, academic lessons, extra-curricular activities, and communal responsibilities, such as senior students supporting juniors with evening routines. These duties instil responsibility and maturity while reinforcing peer support networks—an essential aspect of boarding life.

Many pupils reflected on challenges linked to frequent relocations and parental absence due to military deployment. These disruptions were eased by shared understanding within the school. Pupils noted that being among peers with similar experiences reduced isolation and enhanced adaptability. The “big brother/sister” mentoring initiative was often cited as key to supporting transitions.

Parents outlined the educational and emotional needs of children with learning differences such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and ADHD. They emphasised early diagnosis, continuity of support, and communication between school and external agencies. Several praised the school's pastoral care and individual attention, while noting gaps in coordination between medical, educational, and military systems.

Staff highlighted QVS's all-boarding model, where teaching staff also serve as boarding tutors, ensuring consistent supervision and relationship-building. The school's commitment to holistic care is evident in its emotional literacy programmes, pupil passports for transitions, and a full-time well-being practitioner funded by a veterans' charity.

This illustrates the complex interplay between school structures, individual needs, and community culture in a military-anchored educational setting. It underscores the importance of tailored support, integrated care, and culturally competent teaching for pupils shaped by mobility and service-related challenges.



Chapter 9:

Charming the Snakes and Building the Ladders – A Synthesis of Findings

Who can play the game?²³⁰

To earn a counter in this game, the child or young person:

- should have an additional support need either identified or not; and
- should come from a family with an armed forces background.

Do I want to play the game?

Discussions with children revealed a mixed picture on recognition. While some children were very enthusiastic about being specifically recognised as “armed forces children” and were proud of that status others simply wanted to be identified like all other children. As one pupil stated *“I don’t want to be thought of as that weird Navy kid.”* All of the parents described what they saw as the unique and distinguishing features of their children’s lives, even in the context of additional support needs. In all cases school staff were very clear that the presence of substantial numbers of armed forces children made their establishments different in terms of the range and intensity of needs they were facing. One school had recognised this to the degree that they had invested in an excellent film, co-produced with children, describing what made this group special. Schools were equally clear that this uniqueness merited a special response both in the nature and level of resources required.

VIGNETTE: Armed Forces Young People at Firrhill High School (A Film)

Firrhill High School, located in Edinburgh, has worked closely with armed forces families, their children and young people for many years. Working collaboratively with its associated primary schools, a continuity of support is developed through strong relationships developed in both the short and long-term with families supporting children along their learning journey.

The secondary school has been instrumental in creating a film to illustrate the unique challenges faced by children and young people from armed forces families during their school years. Co-produced at all stages of design, scripting, filming and editing by young people, staff and parents, the 30-minute programme is built around the voices of the armed forces pupils themselves and provides a unique insight into their experiences. Firrhill staff provide a flavour of some of the supports that have been put in place within the school and the ethos that drives them.

The concept, production process, and final product forms an informative and inspiring commentary on the challenges and opportunities faced by these children and young people together with what effective provision looks like.

The contributions of the staff and young people are an impressive testimony, forming a very positive statement on the contribution armed forces pupils make to the school and how, in turn, the school supports them through an empathetic approach.

The headteacher says *“the timing, the staff, the young people, and the extra financial support provided came together in a way that allowed them to make the film. Through this production they were able to raise awareness of the challenges faced during school years, the barriers, support opportunities, and the positive potential of young people from armed forces families.*

Our plan is to share our film with as many schools across the UK as possible and our hope is that this will help schools to better understand the particular needs of pupils from armed forces backgrounds.”

The world premier screening of this half hour film was held in early February 2025, in the Centre for Military Research, Education and Public Engagement, at Edinburgh Napier University. Both the film and the way this high quality launch event was organised were excellent advertisements for the school and the support it gives to armed forces children.

The film, and how it was produced, will be of inestimable value to colleagues in other schools, and across the UK. Its existence answers a need expressed by some staff members in the fieldwork stage of this research.

Recognition in research

Chapter 1 of this paper starts to highlight the paradox. Those professionals who have contact with this group of young people are clear about their needs and describe this clearly. This is not matched however by the volume of current, detailed research on the matter. So, an almost illogical position has been reached where there is an assertion of need while simultaneously acknowledging that insufficient is known either about the numbers of children involved or the nature of their needs or their level. To some degree this research project has addressed these deficiencies.

Recognition in policy and practice

Whether or not an armed forces child who requires additional support in their education can be identified depends very much on the jurisdiction in which they are found. Although the recognition of armed forces status is the most limited in Scotland, of all 4 UK jurisdictions, such a child is far more likely to be recognised as eligible to enter the game north of the border. That same child may then be deprived of that eligibility when they move out of Scotland. This is a consequence of the different definitions of eligibility across the UK on the one hand, and the high levels of identification of need in Scotland. A child may therefore earn a counter in this game only to have it taken away when they move. This study provides some evidence, worthy of further investigation, that mobility resulting in a failure to identify need means that some children may not be identified leading to under-representation of armed forces children in the additional support needs population.

The Rules for Playing the Game



What the playing surface looks like

This game is more complex than it looks at first sight.

The first complexity is that there are many more “squares on the board” than are at first apparent. As some of the children and parents pointed out, and was acknowledged as a limit on this study movements can involve more than the four UK jurisdictions. A number of children have experience of the private sector or schooling in Germany, Cyprus or other Commonwealth countries and may, therefore, enter the game at an intermediate square. Within each jurisdiction differences in policies and procedures exist between education authorities and schools which may, to varying degrees, result in challenges.

Once the number of squares and the limit of the board has been recognised it is then important to understand that short of a wholesale revision of the devolution settlement and local government reorganisation the size and number of squares, and therefore number of challenges will not change. It is also true that some of the features found within each square such as the legal basis of provision, curriculum structures, and matters such as age of transition are also not readily susceptible to change. These differences are some of the most obvious, and irksome, to parents and children. To be useful therefore, the discussion must focus on those matters which are capable of being influenced.

The discussions with parents showed that, almost inevitably, they associate any challenges or barriers with their armed forces status. This may not be the case. As described in Chapter 6 across the UK, and including Scotland educational support systems are perceived as being in varying states of crisis. The problems and challenges therefore being faced by armed forces families, particularly where these involve access to specific resources in many cases will not be unique to them. The challenges being faced armed forces families must therefore be seen and interpreted against those wider issues in a system with finite resources and which itself, as well illustrated in table 20 is subject to increasing pressure.

Knowing the counters – armed forces children and their needs

“Our children didn’t sign up for King and Country, but they sacrifice so much in the cause.”²³¹

What the desk studies told us

The literature survey identified that relatively little is known about this group of children and young people and that there were, in fact, substantial gaps in knowledge. In part these stemmed from challenges in collecting data on the population as a result of variations in parents being prepared to declare their status meaning that even at the descriptive level little existed on either numbers or distribution. Those studies that focused on armed forces children tended to concentrate on the effects of mobility and deployment rather than the generalities of the learner’s experience. Little account was taken of the differences in educational systems within the UK and the impact of these different learning contexts. The literature is therefore of limited usefulness in gaining a deeper understanding of armed forces children who require support in their learning.

²³¹ Social media post by parent from the Dandelion Project, Moray, December 2024

What the fieldwork told us

The descriptions given by families and the children and young people themselves revealed that not only did they think that there was insufficient understanding of their situation but they felt provision would be better if that understanding existed. To support their case examples were provided of some of the unique features of life in an armed forces family and to what they saw as deficiencies of support for example from the lack of access to the extended family. This support was not mitigated sufficiently in their view by military line managers. Families and children particularly valued schools where there were staff who had direct experience of armed forces life and who therefore, in their view, had a level of empathy and understanding that was not generally present.

For their part schools also recognised the same picture as the families and children. Some establishments had gone to some lengths to ensure that positive relationships could be built with families based on a deeper understanding of the armed forces lifestyle and the pressures this could bring on young learners. Gaps were identified in initial teacher education and career-long professional learning, although in some cases these deficiencies were being mitigated locally. A particular aspect of the gap in professional knowledge was the lack of knowledge of education systems across the UK and the effect this had on supporting children moving around the UK.

Synthesis

Taken together there is a clear need to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the situation of armed forces children with additional support needs and their families. This learning then needs to be presented in a form in which it is capable of influencing practice. There are examples of local initiatives in Moray, Highland and Argyll and Bute which act as a focus for discussion and which do feed into national forums such as the ADES headteacher and lead officer forums. Occasional national good practice events have been held. There is a need to nurture and sustain these events with supporting resources.

The meaning of being on a ladder or encountering a snake

The discussions with parents, children and schools identified a number of features of their experience which had been helpful (the “ladders”) and some which have introduced challenges or barriers. These latter have tended to interrupt progress and the learner journey and within the meaning of this analogy are characterised as “snakes”. System improvement can therefore be characterised as introducing new ladders or extending the ones that already exist. Alternatively, the elimination of snakes or reducing their length will also improve the learner’s journey.

Charming the snakes

Harmonisation of systems

What the desk studies told us:

This study has shown beyond doubt that the fundamental problem for mobile families moving between jurisdictions is that the 4 UK systems although superficially similar have diverged. The differences that exist are extensive both in strategy and detail. Any entitlements to support established in one system will not be automatically transferrable to another. To some large degree in the account of parents this issue is replicated at lower levels even when there is movement within jurisdictions. There is no equivalence between the terms that define entitlement – SEND, SEN, ASN and ALN – and these pupil populations are different. For parents this position has been shown to be confusing and frustrating. For schools and education authorities it makes providing suitable support to a new, incoming, pupil problematic as the whole basis of previous provision, even if known, may not be understandable.

What the fieldwork told us:

Parents, children and schools recognised the unconformities between the education systems of the UK. Difficulties with different nomenclatures, systems and educational plans combined to cause confusion and hinder children's progress. Some parents could see no justification these differences between systems.

Synthesis:

All four UK jurisdictions are at various stages of revising their policies (codes of practice). There is little, or no, scope to expect these reviews will produce any realignment to the degree they will be fully harmonised. There is too much existing organisational investment in the systems as they stand. However, this study has shown that the existing codes underplay the situation of mobile children. The issues that affect mobile children should be given much more attention as codes of practice are revised.

Inter authority and school differences

What the desk studies told us:

The desk studies identified the fragmentation that exists between the information and advice (SENDIASS) systems within England. The very limited academic research on this general issue was also identified as a gap.

What the fieldwork told us:

Parents have highlighted and schools have confirmed differences in provision and policy exist within jurisdictions at authority and school levels, which can introduce obstacles to continuity.

Synthesis:

Each local authority in Scotland has the statutory responsibility for the adequacy and efficiency of educational provision in its area. Costs are associated with additional support needs provision so these local divergences are understandable. However, given that all Scottish authorities work within a common statutory framework and share the same management information system (SEEMiS) more work needs to be done to understand the reasons for differences, and the impact they have on making effective provision for mobile children.

Information Transfer

What the desk studies told us:

While all of the codes of practice make allowance for the transfer of information in relation to children with statutory plans this topic is not addressed for other children who, as has been shown are in the majority. This issue applies as much for movement from Scotland to elsewhere in the UK as it does for children arriving in Scotland. It also applies to children moving within jurisdictions.²³²

What the fieldwork told us:

The effective transfer of pupil information between schools was seen as the biggest single obstacle to the mobile child's learner journey being seamless. A child with additional support needs who arrives without any information about their prior learning, even if recognised will automatically be subject to a new round of assessments and planning. They will have slid down a snake. The researchers heard often about parents being used as the main medium for the transfer of information and that their account needed to be taken at face value.

Synthesis:

Superficially, this issue should be easy to remedy given that it is a matter of practice rather than policy or procedure. The solution is very much in the hands of schools themselves. However, the absence of clear and explicit guidance for this as a foundation of effective provision in national statements is a gap. Revisions of the national codes should directly address the timeous and thorough passage of information between schools. Such revisions should, as schools have requested, make clear the responsibility for initiating and managing the transfer. It is axiomatic that whatever convention is adopted must be consistent between jurisdictions.

Translation of records

What the desk studies told us:

A much more problematic issue is the translation of records that are transferred. This report has described in considerable detail in chapter 4 the differences in policy between the jurisdictions. How this has led to different pupil populations being identified as requiring additional support was outlined in chapter 6. Taking a child entitled to a statutory plan as an example possession of an EHCP, statement or IDP in England, Northern Ireland or Wales will not automatically confer entitlement to a CSP in Scotland, nor vice versa. This research has been unable to establish whether even this simple principle is widely understood anywhere.

What the fieldwork told us:

What is known, however, is that teachers with experience of more than one system do understand the difference and find it highly problematic. These colleagues have pointed to the very same differences in nomenclature, procedures, assessments and content of documents predicted in chapter 4.

²³² It is acknowledged that an agreement secured through the Ministry of Defence Local Authority Partnership (MODLAP) arrangements has been designed for this purpose, but the limits of this research did not allow its efficacy to be further studied.

Synthesis:

These differences are highly problematic since they are thoroughly embedded in each nation's systems and ways of operating. They therefore do not appear easily susceptible to change. However, schools have suggested that it would be helpful to develop a "pupil passport" document. This is actually not a new idea. Attempts to introduce such a document have been thwarted in the past, however, by the very problem they were trying to solve with a format using terms identifiable with one jurisdiction that had no status in another. It has been suggested by at least one school that this problem can be addressed by using a simple format that deals with two specific issues: a description of the child's needs and a description of the strategies being used to meet those needs.

The development and use of such a passport should not be regarded as a substitute for a complete transfer of information. In the absence, or presence, of either a pupil passport or transfer of formal educational records schools should be encouraged to make informal contact with each other to support mobile pupils.

Waiting lists

What the desk studies told us:

The analysis of the codes of practice in chapters 2 to 4 highlights the importance of process, procedures and plans to each jurisdiction. It was made clear that all systems have a hierarchy of support which culminates in the provision of a statutory plan be it an EHCP, statement, CSP or IDP. Usually (in Scotland's case, always) access to a statutory plan is contingent upon provision by more than one agency beyond education, such as health or social services. Invariably, access to support depends on formal assessment. This safeguards the child in that it underpins the link between needs and access to resources. It also reflects a level of due diligence by ensuring that resources are properly allocated and not diluted by improper use. The issues highlighted in this report are:

- the lead-time used from a report being requested to it being delivered;
- a mobile armed forces child may only be in a location for about two years;
- the statutory time scales are a considerable proportion of the time spent in a military posting; and
- the evidence from tribunals was that in many cases assessments were not being completed in time and needs were therefore not being met.

What the fieldwork told us:

Schools offered the lack of completed assessments for mobile children as an explanation for the apparent under-representation of armed forces children within the additional support needs population. This fact, in its own right was surprising to some professionals who, from their experience felt the numbers should be higher. School staff certainly described children arriving, or leaving, with incomplete or absent assessments. Some parents also identified that it was an issue of concern that children were entering a waiting list but transferring before completion.

Importantly school staff identified that in some places protocols existed that children coming into an area they should not lose their place on the waiting list. However, they also pointed out that this welcome intention was not being fulfilled in practice. In this regard, the findings of this part of the study are entirely consistent with data published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists which observed:

“NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said 7,560 children were waiting for a first appointment as of last spring, while for NHS Lothian the figure was 6,192 and for NHS Lanarkshire it was 8,571. NHS Highland said 1,537 children were waiting for a neurodevelopmental assessment there. However, not all health boards collect this data in the same way and it is not consistently published.”²³³

Leading to their conclusion that the Scottish government should be more transparent about these “hidden waits”.

This part of the research has only established limited evidence about the exact reasons for this problem, although it is beyond doubt that it exists. This is an important topic both for individual young people and for authorities to ensure they are fulfilling their statutory obligations. The topic of how waiting lists are operating, including identification of successful strategies to ensure children’s needs do not go unnecessarily unassessed would merit further work.

Synthesis:

Clearly, this matter is associated with the timeous transfer of complete and informative records. The defensible rule is that, children should not be deprived of support as a consequence of an absence of a complete assessment. Schools and authorities, in discussion with parents should aim to meet the needs of children within the local contexts of learning without delay, but subject to a requirement for an early review.

Pupil placements

What the desk studies told us:

The desk studies identified how difficult it was for families to obtain information in advance of a move and particularly if no firm home address has been established.

In Scotland the position is quite clear that the education authority has a legal responsibility to make adequate and efficient educational provision for any child within their area. This responsibility is amplified for children with additional support needs. As an educational principle no child should be outside of effective educational provision. A child waiting at home until provision is made is not acceptable.

What the fieldwork told us:

The issue of pupil placement in a school was cited by some parents and schools as an issue of concern. Children specifically identified the sometimes-short notice given for a move as a problem. Some young people also cited the timing of the move in the school year as an issue because Scottish schools change their timetables, effectively promoting each year group, in late May or early June.

²³³ Royal College of Psychiatrists “Thousands of children and young people on “hidden” ADHD and autism waiting lists in Scotland”, (14 April 2025)

This change is well in advance of elsewhere in the UK and was cited as one cause of interrupted learning. There are a number of factors operating that bear on this issue, which were identified, including:

- the degree to which some local authority placement policies are fit for purpose;
- the short notice sometimes given for a move, disabling families from identifying a suitable destination school;
- the refusal of authorities to allocate a pupil place until an address within a school delineated (catchment) area had been occupied;
- oversubscription of some schools in areas where there were high numbers of mobile children; and
- the different governance arrangements of schools elsewhere in the UK which apparently allow individual establishments able to refuse a placement for a local child with additional support needs.

One group of parents stated that the differences in the UK education systems might be overcome for individual children by better use being made of either deferred or early entry arrangements. For this group of parents currently policies were being applied inflexibly with adverse effects on children. It was argued that more flexibility would mitigate the differences between English reception classes and nursery/P1 in Scotland. This might also help at the P7/S1 stage which was identified as another discontinuity.

Synthesis:

The Armed Forces Covenant gives specific consideration to school admissions.²³⁴

This document points to the differences in requirements between England and Wales on the one hand and Scotland on the other. Superficially, the conditions imposed on England and Wales are more specific and potentially beneficial to families than Scotland. This was not, however, reflected in discussions with families. This observation notwithstanding it is clear that families could be relieved of much anxiety if a school place was confirmed as early as possible in the process. To improve this situation a number of measures are desirable:

- The Armed Forces should notify families of a move as far in advance as possible.
- If possible, account should be taken of the academic year when secondary aged children are involved avoiding, so far as possible moves into Scotland in September or mid-year moves.
- Local authorities, particularly those with a mobile pupil population should periodically review their admissions or placement policies in the light of best and emerging practice.
- More use should be made of deferred or early entry.

²³⁴ Pages 40–43, Section 3C, Statutory Guidance on the Armed Forces Covenant Duty Covering the United Kingdom Issued under section 343AE(1) of the Armed Forces Act 2006 November, Ministry of Defence, 2022

Lengthening the ladders

Career Long Professional Learning

What the desk studies told us:

The desk studies demonstrated that this is a very complex and changing area of professional concern. The professional standards published by GTCS include requirements that initial teacher education programmes include considerations of additional support needs and this is reflected in the standard for registration. These standards are framed in terms using inclusive vocabulary but, unlike some other groups, there is no focus on mobile children nor armed forces children. The policies within each jurisdiction are lengthy, detailed and technical. Until this study little comparative work has been done on the four UK educational support systems. There is an equivalent gap for the overall systems. In documentation very little exists on the mobile child. As already discussed, the differences in the pupil additional pupil populations identified by this study are not generally known

What the fieldwork told us:

Parents and children were clear that the best educational experiences were when educators had either developed their understanding of the implications of armed forces life or had directly experienced it themselves. Conversely, parents felt that schools need to develop a much better understanding of the Armed Forces as a key to better supporting children. Educators, themselves, recognised this but pointed out that initial teacher education lacks consideration of armed forces families and this gap is largely unaddressed in career long professional learning (CLPL).

Synthesis:

In this context CLPL should not be seen narrowly as being restricted to the provision of centralised courses by Education Scotland, local authorities or other providers although these may have a role. Discussions revealed that a number of schools in the military base areas are developing a real depth of experience and expertise in this area of provision. Much can be learned from the practice in these schools. Opportunities require to be developed where these schools can exchange good practice and discuss the issues (the snakes and ladders) faced by this group of children.

Understanding amplification

What the desk studies told us:

The concept of amplification should be seen in terms of the model presented at figure 2 in which the relationship between needs directly and indirectly attributable to armed forces life was described. This understanding is multi-faceted and requires to consider the factors identified in this study as being potentially detrimental to children's learning including:

- the effects of the unconformities between the mainstream education systems of the UK for mobile children; and
- the effects of the unconformities between the UK's differing systems as experienced by the child for meeting additional needs.

What the fieldwork told us:

The desk studies demonstrated that this is a very complex and changing area of professional concern. The professional standards published by GTCS include requirements that initial teacher education programmes include considerations of additional support needs and this is reflected in the standard for registration. These standards are framed in terms using inclusive vocabulary but, unlike some other groups, there is no focus on mobile children entering systems as experienced by the child for meeting additional needs.

Parents and schools agreed with the concept of amplification which in addition to the factors identified in the desk studies showed these elements as factors:

- the disrupted nature of family life caused by training and deployments;
- the health and wellbeing issues for children arising from separations in the family; and
- the disturbances in friendship groups arising from mobility and relationship issues with other groups of children arising from armed forces status.

Synthesis:

A key to effective CLPL will be the development of an improved understanding of how armed forces life can amplify a child's additional support needs. This will go a long way to answering the criticism of families about what they perceive as a significant gap in professional knowledge in those schools with armed forces children.

This new understanding, to be useful, must be coupled to identifying clear strategies, or location of resources, that can be used to offset each aspect of the situation as it relates to the individual child at each point in their school career.

Resources

What the desk studies told us:

The desk studies identified that there are, apparently, significant differences between the UK jurisdictions in the way resources are deployed to support armed forces children. The most obvious example is the service pupil premium which is found in England, but has no equivalent in Scotland. Conversely, general levels of resourcing for education in Scotland appear to be about £1.500 or more higher than the rest of the UK.

What the fieldwork told us:

There is no doubt that families are looking for and expecting some form of additionality when they arrive in Scotland having experience of the service pupil premium in England. Some also pointed the policies in particular English education authorities where SEND status reportedly led to an automatic allocation of additional resource. Additional funding from the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust was welcomed, but seen to have some defects. Educational staff with experience or expertise in armed forces matters were highly valued by parents, children and schools alike.

There are also some resources that have been developed which, at the operational level, could be highly beneficial. Foremost amongst these was the excellent video produced by one of the schools in the sample visited.

Synthesis:

The issues faced by armed forces children with additional support needs merits some form of recognisable additionality. This can come in the form of additional resources such as funding streams, or in identifying and developing specialist expertise. Decision makers should consider which combination of these complementary solutions best meets needs locally within an overall national strategy.

School induction processes

What the desk studies told us:

It was established that the national codes of practice give little consideration to mobile children and therefore little attention is given to school induction processes. Advice is available to schools on induction processes through the Forces Children's Education website <https://forceschildrenseducation.org.uk>.

What the fieldwork told us:

Parents reported that, in the absence of effective transfer of records between schools they had to fill the gap by relaying information to the receiving school. They also told us that schools which were welcoming and demonstrated an understanding of the issues faced by armed forces families won their confidence. Schools had a range of strategies to help armed forces children to settle in quickly in some, but not all, cases this was supported by bespoke policies. Conversely, when problems were encountered these could lead to expensive or alternative solutions being considered such as boarding school or education at home.

Synthesis:

The initial discussions with parents are of critical value in support of children. Schools should have clear induction policies for armed forces children which may be framed within their overall policies. These policies, in consultation with their education authority should consider how the information provided by parents should be treated in the absence of formal record transfer.

Continuity

What the desk studies told us:

All children moving between jurisdictions will face challenges arising from the basic differences in structures of the four systems. Children with additional support needs will face an entirely different level of challenges and discontinuities as a result of policy and practice.

What the fieldwork told us:

Within the two groups of children and young people identified above, armed forces children may face other challenges that amplify their additional support needs attributable to either mobility or the special characteristics of military life. In some cases, the combined effect of these three situations was such that parents regarded the lack of continuity as being averse to their children's interests. Some of these parents were considering alternatives such as a placement at Queen Victoria School, boarding school or education at home.

Synthesis:

This study has shown that maintaining the integrity of families including the extended family, limiting disruption and the burden on individual parents as lone carers were important to children and parents alike. Moving to a different way of educating therefore creates a potential discontinuity and could impose additional financial or work and responsibility burdens on parents. Ideally parents should not feel in this position in the first place, but for those who do, objective and independent advice on alternatives to state education should be available.

Advice and Support

What the desk studies told us:

The desk studies indicated that there is actually no shortage of advice services. Provision of advice and engagement with families is central to policy across the UK. However, the system is fragmented, not user-friendly, incomplete in that the cases of mobile or armed forces children are poorly considered, and inaccessible in some cases and situations.

What the fieldwork told us:

For the proactive parent who is competent in basic research and motivated, the information is available. These parents were in the minority. Some thought there was no information available while others found the landscape to be complex and confusing. They were unaware of the main, or authoritative, sources of information and related that front-line welfare services were unable to advise or even provide signposting.

Synthesis:

Specific advice on mobility, including between jurisdictions, and its implications should be available and accessible. To become useful clear signposting to authoritative information should be available from schools and through armed forces welfare services. The provision of advice should recognise that parents may not even realise they need advice. Those who moved to Scotland and found the existence of a different education system to be “a shock” are a case in point. This requires proactivity by schools, welfare services and the chain of command. The parental idea of specialist, independent educational advice being available to main base areas should be considered.

Conclusion

The experience of parents and children is of a game of snakes and ladders. Like most games some are better placed to play it than others. For the proactive, literate and knowledgeable parent it is easy to play. Similarly, for those parents and children who are resilient or who accept the issues associated with armed forces life as being “just part of the job” it may present challenges but these are easier to accept. The desk studies have shown that, as they are designed, the present systems give insufficient recognition to the situation of armed forces children and young people. Some may not realise the “snakes” exist until they land on them; others may not know where to find the ladders. As presently only limited account is taken of the needs of such families.

Some issues such as the way resources are allocated or matters fundamental to the national education system are relatively intractable. However, a number of measures such as clarifying the responsibility for the transfer of school records, or provision of focused CLPL appear readily solved. A number of pathways through the game are suggested in the following chapter.



Chapter 10:

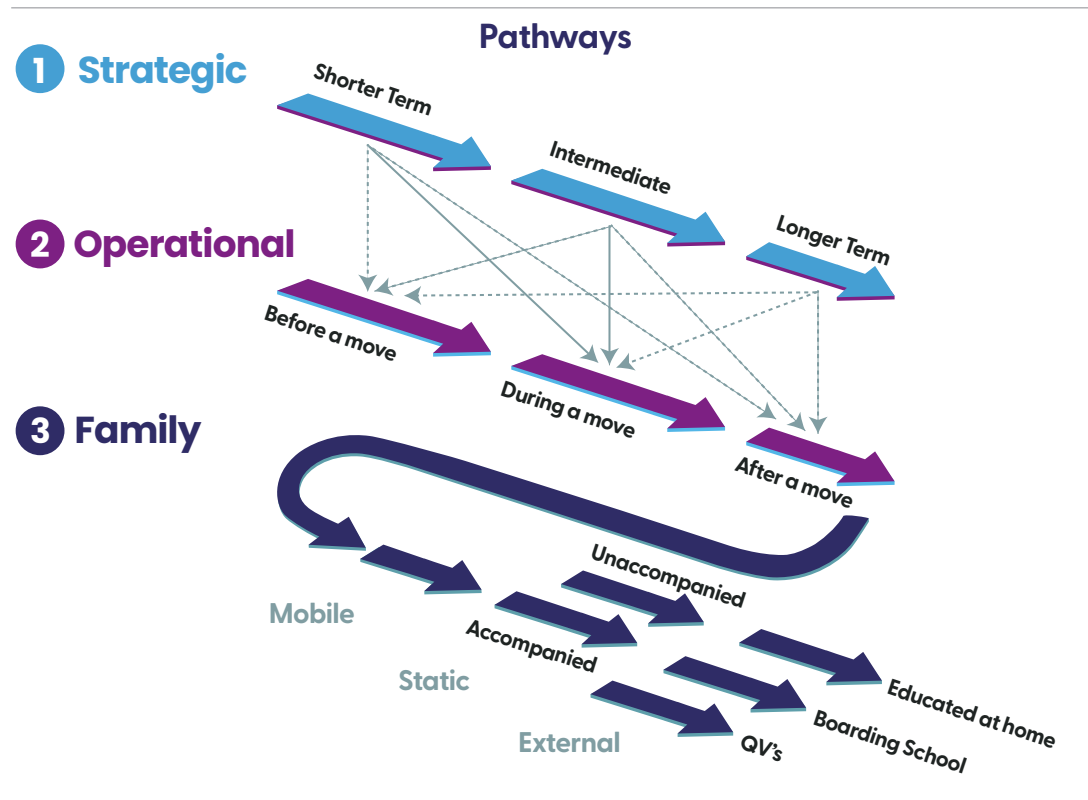
Developing Pathways: An Easier Way to Win the Game

The work undertaken in this research has led to a realisation that a single pathway may not provide a complete solution to the identified issues. Instead, three pathways are identifiable:

- pathway 1: the strategic pathway;
- pathway 2: the operational pathway; and
- pathway 3: an individual family pathway.

To some degree these pathways are not completely independent, but link to each other. The relationship between the three pathways is illustrated in figure 3. This diagram shows the critical interaction between policy and strategy (pathway 1); actual practice (pathway 2); and how these directly affect the decisions that families may have to take. Ultimately, success in pathway 1 should, through effective practice in pathway 2 result in easier and better-informed decisions being taken in pathway 3.

Figure 3: A diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the strategic, operational and family pathways



The overall context is provided by **“Pathway 1: The Strategic Pathway”**. This exists in the area where decisions require to be taken by senior decision makers in national government and local government or the third sector. In the nature of these organisations’ consultation, the involvement of stakeholders and, as necessary the involvement of politicians is required. These processes are time consuming and do not directly involve either families or schools. To be judged effective each step in this pathway must be capable of influencing each part of the operational pathway.

The actions involved in **“Pathway 2: The Operational Pathway”** are much nearer the point of service delivery with implications for those who are directly involved in either delivering or receiving the service. Many of the actions identified in this pathway either should be happening already or, if not, can be quickly implemented. Some points in the pathway, however, are affected by decisions in “Pathway 1”. An example is the suggestion regarding pupil passports. Schools might want to wait for provision of a national template for a pupil passport, but there is no reason to prevent them immediately using their own format, if they think it would be of immediate help to their children.

“Pathway 3: The Individual Family Pathway” is different. Inevitably families in reaching decisions about how they wish to proceed with their children’s education, and as a family will be influenced by how well Pathway’s 1 and 2 are working for their child. A family that decides to be mobile as a unit has a key role to play in Pathway 2. Before reaching a decision in Pathway 3, they may therefore wish consider their own role in Pathway 2 at the particular points that are relevant – for example their role in notifying the “sending” and “receiving” schools.

The decisions in Pathway 3 are not as compartmentalised as they are presented. Some families may be on the cusp of a decision between one option and another. Another group of families may have their views coloured by their local experience of services. A number of parents in discussions highlighted that some of their positive and negative experiences were “people based” rather than “system based”. In other words when they had been actively engaged and their confidence had been won, they were more disposed towards decisions towards the start of the pathway. Only when their confidence had been eroded did they consider the more radical options such boarding school or home education.

The Pathways

Figure 4: Pathway 1 - The strategic pathway

Priority for Action	Activity	Responsibility	Notes
Actions that are capable of being overtaken in the shorter term.	A shared format for a pupil passport focused on needs and support strategies should be agreed.	Partnership between the 4 jurisdictions	Should also involve DCS schools.
	A shared convention should be developed for the transfer of pupil records both within and between the four UK jurisdictions.	Partnership between the 4 jurisdictions and DCS.	This is concerned with what should be transferred and when.
	A shared convention for the responsibility for transferring records should be developed.	Partnership between the 4 jurisdictions.	This is about which establishment is responsible for managing the process.
	As local authorities review admissions policies, specific consideration to be given to armed forces families.	Local authorities	These reviews should seek to introduce more flexibility and issues such as deferred and early entry
	When recruiting support staff to schools with populations of armed forces children appropriate consideration should be given to person specifications which include experience of the issues important to this group.	Local authorities	This should conform to authority recruitment procedures.
	Funding bodies should consider how additional resourcing might be managed on a more strategic basis.	Funding bodies	
	Within base areas the Armed Forces should consider the quality and extent of educational advice available to families and how these can be made proactive.	Chain of command ²³⁵	
	The Armed Forces should consider policies on how movements are managed can be made more family-friendly	Chain of command	This should be consistent with operational requirements.
	Approaches to programmes of career long professional learning should be developed which give specific consideration to: • Mobile children; and • Children from an Armed Forces background This should take specific account of the distinctive nature of family life and the needs of this group.	Education Scotland Local authorities Schools	

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²³⁵ "Chain of Command" as used in this pathway refers to the decision makers at the appropriate level of authority within the uniformed armed services.

Figure 4: Pathway 1 - The strategic pathway continued

Priority for Action	Activity	Responsibility	Notes
Actions important in the intermediate term	As codes of practice are reviewed specific consideration given to: - armed forces children and young people; - the effects of mobility and how these should be mitigated; and - the implications of movement between jurisdictions for all children with support needs.	Devolved administrations	This should be done as part of the continuing review cycle of codes of practice.
	Further research should be undertaken on the operation of waiting lists to identify the extent of the problem, the obstacles and how these might be mitigated.	Universities	
Longer term	The support needs of mobile children should be considered within programmes of initial teacher education and the standard for registration	Teacher Education Institutions	Also considered within programmes for newly qualified teachers (NQTs)

Figure 5: Pathway 2 - The operational pathway

Stage	Step	Notes
Before the Move	Child with an already identified ASN, or who has a need which is being assessed	School and authority making provision
	Family of child notified of posting to another jurisdiction well in advance, with the move ideally timed for May or June.	This will avoid disruption caused by differences in the school year
	Family proactively provided with authoritative advice on implications of move, or signposted to that advice on education and additional support systems. And/or the family proactively seek support or an assessment.	
	Family start making arrangements for move, including as appropriate engagement with educational psychology or the local authority	
	Family allocated a house at specific address in new posting, or given a holding address in the same school delineated area to use.	This will allow direct contact with an identified school
	Family contacts the school to arrange a visit informing them that they have armed forces status and that child has support needs.	School notifies the local authority lead officer.
	Family notifies child's present school of move with name and address given to discuss child with destination school.	Present school contacts destination school to provide background information School makes arrangements to allow maintenance of friendship groups.

Continued on the following page

Figure 5: Pathway 2 – The operational pathway continued

Stage	Step	Notes
Before the Move	Child with an already identified ASN, or who has a need which is being assessed	School and authority making provision
	Family of child notified of posting to another jurisdiction well in advance, with the move ideally timed for May or June.	This will avoid disruption caused by differences in the school year
	Family proactively provided with authoritative advice on implications of move, or signposted to that advice on education and additional support systems. And/or the family proactively seek support or an assessment.	
	Family start making arrangements for move, including as appropriate engagement with educational psychology or the local authority	
	Family allocated a house at specific address in new posting, or given a holding address in the same school delineated area to use.	This will allow direct contact with an identified school
	Family contacts the school to arrange a visit informing them that they have armed forces status and that child has support needs.	School notifies the local authority lead officer.
	Family notifies child's present school of move with name and address given to discuss child with destination school.	Present school contacts destination school to provide background information School makes arrangements to allow maintenance of friendship groups.
	Parents and child visit the school to meet key staff and to be shown around. Exploration of implications of any differences in the curriculum explored to minimise disruption in the context of child's additional support needs.	Zoom/Teams meeting should be used if a visit not possible. Issues such as year group placement, deferment and early entry discussed.
	Parents either make a placing request following local authority guidelines to another school or consider Pathway 3	This will inevitably introduce delays and avoidable interruption to the learner journey.
	Destination school makes plans for reception of pupil including how needs will be met on transfer.	
During the Move	Sending school prepares pupil passport	
	Pupil transfers to new school. Induction arrangements invoked.	For example, buddy or mentor appointed.
	Appropriate temporary support measure put in place to support pupil.	
	Former school immediately transfers pupil records and pupil passport to new school within 15 calendar days.	Records reviewed by member of support staff.
	Support team meeting immediately convened to discuss child's needs with engagement of child and parent.	This will be appropriate to the child's needs and will review the stages reached in assessment.
	As necessary other agencies involved to complete assessments and develop plans.	
	Support arrangements confirmed or modified according to local policies and support resources.	

Figure 5: Pathway 2 – The operational pathway continued

Stage	Step	Notes
After a move of school or support for in situ families	Sending school contacted to clarify any issues emerging during the transition.	
	Any outstanding assessments completed without loss of place on waiting lists.	
	Pupil supported by member of staff from the school, cluster or local authority with experience or expertise in armed forces issues.	Discussions to include how friendship groups are being maintained
	Additional (targeted) support or additional support provided as necessary.	
	Parent and child discuss with school any issue arising as a consequence of the transition.	
	Pupil progress monitored by school in the light of any known deployments, training obligations, disruptions to family life.	Monitoring to include wellbeing and mental health as well as attainment (SHANARRI)
	Family support provided as necessary.	
	Pupil progress managed through established ASN policies.	

This pathway is founded on a strong partnership between the parents and the schools involved. While clear expectations exist, that schools will give an emphasis to the effective transition of armed forces children, parents, too, need to ensure that headteachers and their staff have sufficient and timeous information. For example, the “sending” school should be informed as far in advance as possible of any move with any details of location and the identity of the “receiving” school, if known. Both of the schools need to be strongly and positively engaged with parents. In the case of the “sending” school this will be the result of its wider approaches to supporting parents’ involvement in children’s learning. For the “receiving” school these first contact will be an opportunity to demonstrate their welcoming ethos and the way they value parents and children.

All schools will have existing policies and well-tried procedures for transition associated with general movements of the school population – most obviously at times when children move from one stage of education or childcare to the next. Here, the appeal is for there to be recognition of the additionality which may be needed for armed forces families and their situation which will require flexibility to be built into policies and their application. At one level this is an expression of the responsibilities implied by the Armed Forces Covenant. At another level it is in the needs created by a child having experienced frequent moves or that moves will be at short notice. Most obviously the support that is available from both parents at the time of a move will be an important consideration together with how this can best be secured. In this, the situation and needs of each child, and family, should be examined on an individual basis in a way that is consistent with GIRFEC.

Ultimately, the success of the operational pathway depends fundamentally on the last step in the first pathway. An effective programme of teacher education, and career-long professional learning. This requires school- or early years-based staff to be aware of the issues faced by armed forces families and how these might best be mitigated. This in turn requires there to be professional reflection within establishments but also a willingness to learn from best practice elsewhere. At the centre of this area of concern is for there to be a focus on children with additional support needs and the effects that a career in the Armed Forces can have on family life. Since armed forces families must be regarded as a heterogeneous group, where local circumstances are important, the nearer this career-long professional learning takes place to the class or playroom, the better.

Figure 6: Pathway 3 - The individual family pathway

Nature of Educational Option	Mainly Suited To:	Advantages and Disadvantages
Child and family remain mobile, moving with postings.	Younger children who have no, low level or temporary ASN.	Retains family unity and support. No implication for parent's military career. But Will result in interrupted learning and possibility that ASN will be missed or go unassessed.
Child to stay in one state school with family unit retained	Older children approaching public examinations. Children with higher level of additional support needs. Parent employed in a settled long-term posting.	May be the obvious, low-cost option for families in a long-term settled posting. Retains continuity of education and ASN support.
Child to stay in one state school with family opting for unaccompanied posting.	Older children approaching public examinations. Children with higher level of additional support needs. Substantially disrupts family life. Children in a specialist placement paid for by the local authority. But where the parent's career depends on specific postings or training opportunities.	Retains continuity of education and ASN support and does not risk entering the game of snakes and ladders. But May be stressful for child. Majority of care responsibility falls on one parent. The mobile parent becomes disconnected from child's education and wider progress.
The child is placed at Queen Victoria School, Dunblane	Families who can afford the fees. P7 (year 6) upwards, Children who fulfil the QVS's admission criteria.	Secures continuity of education and removes the uncertainties associated with mobility. But Places are limited. Termly fee of £585 in 2024/25. School may not be able to meet the child's support needs. Child may not thrive away from the family.
The child is placed in in a boarding school.	Families who can afford the fees. Families who have a specific preference for private education.	Secures continuity of education and removes the uncertainties associated with mobility. But School may not be able to meet the child's support needs. Child may not thrive away from the family.

Continued on the following page

Figure 6: Pathway 3 – The individual family pathway continued

Nature of Educational Option	Mainly Suited To:	Advantages and Disadvantages
The child is educated	The parent must have the capacity and capability to deliver an education suited to child's age, ability and aptitude. Cases where it has been difficult to secure a suitable school placement. Cases where child's needs are not being met as a direct consequence of mobility.	Secures continuity of education. Child can move with the family. But May not solve the issue of access to specialist health, or other, assessments and provision. Child may be isolated from peer group.

The description of the “Game of Snakes and Ladders” in chapter 9 immediately suggested a decision- making pathway for armed forces families with children with additional support needs. Those advising families on effective educational provision should be aware of this pathway.

Within this pathway there is a very specific type of provision “child in a specialist placement paid for by the local authority” which applies to children with higher tariff needs. In such cases the local authority may decide that the only way to meet a child's needs is to place them in specialist provision. This may be in one of the local authority's own special schools or units attached to a mainstream school, or in another authority's school, or through a placement in the private or voluntary sector. All of these types of provision tend to have lower pupil: adult ratios, specialist expertise and special equipment. Such placements can be very expensive, and they may be remote from the home requiring specialist transport provision, paid for by the authority. Others may require a residential placement. The decisions on placing a child in any of these provisions are complex and invariably supported by thorough and lengthy assessments on a multi-agency basis. They are therefore extremely lengthy. A local authority will not take such a placement decision lightly, not least because of the costs involved. In considering this level of option authorities are, for due diligence reasons required to establish the permanent residence of the family as it is the authority in whose area the family reside that must pay the costs. Authorities will not easily assume responsibility for an expensive placement without a thorough review of each individual case. It must also be said that a continued cycle of change will be disproportionately disruptive for children with this level of need. For these children, therefore, for practical and educational reasons the preferred decision will be weighted significantly towards staying in one location, sacrificing their mobility with the consequence of accepting unaccompanied postings. This decision, in its own right, implies that one partner will be unavailable for much of the time to provide the support deserved by children with severe, profound or complex needs.

While home education may appear as a convenient option, it may not be the most suitable option. The responsibilities associated with home education are onerous with the legal responsibility for a child's education passing back from the state, in the shape of the local authority, to the parent. In this context it is important to understand that while parents reported examples where it had been extremely difficult to secure a school placement elsewhere in the UK this should not be the case in Scotland.

A map of support

To augment the pathways it has also proved important to develop a “map” of the support available to families in enabling them to reach well-informed decisions. This need arises from the paradox emerging from this research that while many families complain about the lack of support and information others, and professionals, complain that there is so much on offer that the landscape is over-complex and difficult to navigate. Figure 4 attempts to simplify this landscape by identifying the main sources of information and the levels at which they operate. The organisations identified in figure 7 are examples chosen for their relative prominence in the sector. It would be for the family, or the professionals supporting them, to identify which entry point in this map is potentially most helpful to them depending on the nature of their concern.

Figure 7: Map of Support Available to Armed Forces Families of Children with Additional Support Needs

	Examples of Types of Organisation/ Source of information	Notes
National information with armed forces background	Defence Children's Services	MoD – all UK
	Discovermybenefits.mod.gov.uk	MoD – all UK
	Forces Children's Education Forceschildrenseducation.org.uk	Scotland
	Supporting Service Children in Education in Wales www.sseccymru.co.uk	Wales
	Service Children in State Schools Sciss.org.uk	England
National general information on education	Education Scotland https://education.gov.scot	Authoritative source on all issues related to Scottish Education
	ADES www.adesscot	Linked to forceschildrenseducation.org. uk
	Department for Education www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ department-for-education	Authoritative source on education in England
	The Scottish Government www.scotland.org.uk	Authoritative source on all issues related to Scotland including education
	Northern Ireland Department of Education www.education-ni.gov.uk	Authoritative source on all issues related to educational policy in Northern Ireland
	Northern Ireland Education Authority www.eani.org.uk	Authoritative source on operational educational issues in Northern Ireland
	The Welsh Government www.gov.wales/education-skills	Authoritative source on all issues related to Wales including education

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Figure 7: Map of Support Available to Armed Forces Families of Children with Additional Support Needs continued

	Examples of Types of Organisation/ Source of information	Notes
Specific to one jurisdiction specialised in educational support but no armed forces emphasis	Enquire Enquire.org.uk	National, general ASN advice , includes information on moving to Scotland
	Special Educational Needs Advisory Centre (SENAC) senac.co.uk	General SEN advice for Northern Ireland
	SNAP Cymru www.snapcymru.org	General ALN advice for Wales
	SENDIASS www.kids.org.uk	153 different organisations of varying quality and accessibility across England
	Council for Disabled Children web site www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk	Gives overview of SENDIASS in England
General support to armed forces families, including education.	Army Families Federation aff.org.uk	Offer advice in addition to information. Although work at UK level, are also aware of issues in all 4 jurisdictions.
	Navy Families Federation nff.org.uk	
	RAF Families Federation www.raf-ff.org.uk	
	Naval Children's Charity www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk	
Armed forces charities but no educational specialisation eg:	Royal British Legion Britishlegion.org.uk	There are a wide range of armed forces charities each with a different focus of interest, the 4 given here are only examples.
	Royal British Legion Scotland Legionscotland.org.uk	
	Poppy Scotland Poppyscotland.org.uk	
	Soldiers Sailors and Air Force Association (SSAFA) Ssafo.org.uk	
Charities with emphasis on children but no armed forces specialisation eg	Children First www.childrenfirst.org.uk	Has done specific project work with armed forces children
	National Autistic Society www.autism.org.uk	
	Scottish Autism www.scottishautism.org	
	Dyslexia Scotland dyslexiascotland.org.uk	

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**Figure 7: Map of Support Available to Armed Forces Families of Children
with Additional Support Needs continued**

	Examples of Types of Organisation/ Source of information	Notes
Charities with emphasis on armed forces and children or education.	Armed Forces Education Trust Armedforceseducation.org	
	Forces Children Scotland Forceschildrenscotland.org.uk	
	Greenwich Hospital Greenwichhospital.co.uk	
	Scotty's Little Soldiers Scottyslittlesoldiers.co.uk	
	Never Such Innocents Neversuchinnocence.com	
Professional support with background in armed forces but not education eg	Army Welfare Service	Support here may mainly be to signpost to other more specific sources of advice or information.
	Chain of command	
Professional support with background in education but no direct armed forces background eg	Child's school	May have armed forces specialist support staff
	Local authority: directorate, learning support services, educational psychology	May have a service children's champion in England or Armed Forces Lead Officer in Scotland
Other	Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP)	Advice and support to educators



Chapter 11:

Conclusions and Recommendations

There remains a critical need to investigate the long-term academic and socio-emotional impacts of military life on young learners. Addressing this issue requires a collaborative approach involving researchers, educators, policymakers, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Current policy documents and grey literature highlight considerable gaps in empirical research. These gaps underscore the urgency of exploring the educational experiences of armed forces children with additional support needs (ASN) and evaluating the effectiveness of existing support frameworks.

Although three dominant research themes have emerged in the UK context namely, the impact of mobility on education, parental deployment, and identity formation existing discussions often overlook the compounded challenges faced by armed forces children with ASN. This omission points to a significant deficiency in current academic inquiry and policy attention.

The limited research on additional educational support for armed forces children reveals persistent barriers in accessing support services, navigating school transitions, and managing the academic disruptions caused by parental deployment. The lack of systematic investigation into these areas hinders the formulation of effective, evidence-based policies and constrains educators' capacity to implement targeted interventions. There is, therefore, a pressing need for child-centred inquiry, longitudinal research, and innovative methodologies to generate a more holistic understanding of the educational trajectories of armed forces children with ASN.

Bridging the gap between policy, practice, and academic research is essential to ensuring that these children receive the personalised support required to thrive. Interdisciplinary and inter-agency collaboration is vital to develop interventions that are informed by both the lived experiences of armed forces families and rigorous empirical evidence.

As outlined in Chapter 1, a key objective of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation of armed forces children with ASN in Scotland. This included estimating their prevalence and geographical distribution, as well as identifying the types of additional needs most commonly encountered. The study also sought to assess the scope and quality of existing support provisions and highlight areas requiring improvement. These core objectives have been substantially addressed. Nevertheless, this research represents only an initial step, and the topic warrants continued scholarly and policy engagement.

The challenges faced by armed forces families with children requiring additional support are considerable. Evidence gathered from schools, parents, and children suggests that these difficulties weigh heavily on affected families. Navigating complex educational systems is frequently described as overwhelming, with the quality and accessibility of available advice often falling short. Even locating accurate and relevant information can be a challenge. As this research has shown, the systems that should support these families are often opaque, bureaucratically complex, and poorly aligned to their needs.

This already difficult landscape is further complicated by the structural differences between education systems across the UK's devolved administrations. For many families, such differences appear arbitrary, driven more by administrative boundaries than by the educational needs of children. The rationale for these variations is often unclear, exacerbating families' sense of disorientation.

All of this occurs against a backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction across the UK regarding the provision of educational support for children experiencing learning challenges. This concern is recognised at both governmental and parliamentary levels. Each UK nation is currently engaged in a review of its approach to supporting learners with additional needs, though progress and focus vary between jurisdictions. For families, this evolving policy landscape contributes further to their uncertainty: it is not always clear whether the issues they face stem from the unique pressures of military life and mobility or from broader systemic challenges affecting all families. Waiting lists and delays in assessments serve as key examples of such ambiguity.

Nonetheless, these ongoing national reviews of ASN and SEND policy represent a timely opportunity to consider more systematically the needs of mobile families in general – and armed forces families in particular. It is within this complex context that families often experience what can be described metaphorically as a problematic game of snakes and ladders: progress can be quickly undone, and pathways toward support are inconsistent and unpredictable.

The structured pathways proposed in Chapter 10 are intended to mitigate the impact of this uncertainty and provide greater clarity for families and professionals alike. In addition to these pathways, several specific, evidence-informed recommendations have emerged from this research. These are outlined below and are intended to complement the proposed models of practice.

Recommendations:

For All Agencies

- Schools, welfare services and the chain of command should be proactive in signposting advice to families who need it.

For research

- Sustained, strategic collaboration among the Ministry of Defence (MoD), schools, local authorities, and educational professionals is essential for the systematic collection of data, refinement of support frameworks, and development of targeted interventions. The establishment of robust, cross-sector partnerships will enable the design and implementation of evidence-informed policies that more effectively respond to the educational and socio-emotional needs of children from armed forces families.

- Future research should prioritise longitudinal investigations into the academic outcomes and socio-emotional development of armed forces children. Such studies are critical to deepening our understanding of how military life influences educational attainment, emotional resilience, and social integration over time.
- Furthermore, raising awareness and reducing the stigma associated with the distinct challenges faced by armed forces children is imperative. Educational institutions and policymakers must collaborate to cultivate inclusive, responsive learning environments in which the specific needs of this group are fully recognised, meaningfully understood, and adequately addressed.

For governments in the four national jurisdictions

- The issues that affect mobile children should be given much more attention as codes of practice are revised.
- Revisions of the national codes should directly address the timeous and thorough passage of information between schools. Such revisions should, as schools have requested, make clear the responsibility for initiating and managing the transfer. Whatever convention is adopted must be consistent between jurisdictions.
- A simple pupil passport should be developed in consultation between the 4 UK jurisdictions that focuses on children's needs and the strategies used to meet them. This should not be regarded as a substitute for the transfer of a complete educational record.
- Further research should be undertaken on the operation of waiting lists to identify the reasons for delays in assessment, the transferability of assessments, the loss of priority caused by moves, and identification of good practice where it exists. This research should cover all the main agencies which support children.
- Specific parent-friendly advice on mobility, including between jurisdictions, and its implications should be available and accessible.

For the chain of command and Ministry of Defence

- Families should be notified of a move as far in advance as possible by the Armed Forces (MOD).
- Account should be taken of the academic year when secondary aged children are involved in a move. Such moves should avoid, so far as possible moves into Scotland in September or mid-year moves. This will minimise unnecessary interruptions of learning caused by differences in the school year between jurisdictions.
- Where additionality of funding is available it should be strategic and based on an administratively simple approach based on an overall appreciation of the levels and distributions of needs.
- Objective, independent and authoritative advice should be available for armed forces parents considering alternatives to education at their local state school.
- Provision of specialist, independent educational advice being available to main base areas should be considered.

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Appendix 1: Summary of the Formats of the Statutory Plans for Children and Young People Across the Four UK Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	England: Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP)	Northern Ireland Statement	Scotland: Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP)	Wales: Individual Development Plan
Source	Page 161, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years Statutory guidance for organisations which work with and support children and young people who have special educational needs or disabilities January 2015.	Annex 11, The draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 202X.	Pages 157-162, Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) 2017.	Annex A Pages 352-359, The Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021.
Format as set out in the respective codes of practice	The format to be agreed locally, but to include: Section A: The views, interests and aspirations of the child and his or her parents or the young person. Section B: The child or young person's special educational needs. Section C: The child or young person's health needs which are related to their SEN. Section D: The child or young person's social care needs which are related to their SEN or to a disability. Section E: The outcomes sought for the child or the young person. This should include outcomes for adult life. The EHC plan should also identify the arrangements for the setting of shorter term targets by the early years provider, school, college or other education or training provider. Section F: The special educational provision required by the child or the young person. Section G: Any health provision reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN. Where an Individual Health Care Plan is made for them, that plan should be included.	Part 1: Administrative details Name and address Parent details Part 2: Special educational needs The Authority's assessment of the child's special educational needs ...Clearly set out the primary need in line with Departmental guidance. Part 3: The nature and extent of the special educational provision to be made for the purpose of meeting the needs in particular (a) the nature and extent of the Authority's special educational provision for the child such as, appropriate facilities, equipment, staffing arrangements, advice and assistance, training etc; and	Administrative details: Name Parent details School attended etc Profile "A summary that encapsulates the child or young person" Factors giving rise to additional support needs Based on a multi-agency assessment including views of parent and child/young person Educational objectives Additional support required Persons providing additional support Nominated school Child/young person's Comments CSP Review Timetable EA contact points	Section 1A: Biographical and contact details Name and address, parent details etc Section 1B: Responsibility for the IDP Section 1C: Profile (about me) Section 2A: Description of the child or young person's additional learning needs (ALN) Section 2B: Description and delivery of the child or young person's provision (ALP) Type of provision, who, when, rationale and outcome. Section 2D: Placement at a named school/institution or board lodging Section 3A: Record of information used to develop the IDP Section 3B: Timeline of key events Section 3C: Transition Section 3D: Travel arrangements

Continued on the following page

Appendix 1: Summary of the Formats of the Statutory Plans for Children and Young People Across the Four UK Jurisdictions continued

Jurisdiction	England: Education and Healthcare Plan (EHCP)	Northern Ireland Statement	Scotland: Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP)	Wales: Individual Development Plan
Format as set out in the respective codes of practice	Section H1: Any social care provision which must be made for a child or young person resulting from section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. Section H2: Any other social care provision reasonably required by the learning difficulties or disabilities which result in the child or young person having SEN. Section I: The name and type of the school, maintained nursery school, post-16 institution or other institution to be attended by the child or young person and the type of that institution. Section J: Where there is a Personal Budget, the details of how the Personal Budget will support particular outcomes, the provision it will be used for including any flexibility in its usage and the arrangements for any direct payments for education, health and social care. Section K: The advice and information gathered during the EHC needs assessment must be attached. There should be a list of this advice and information.	(b) the school's special educational provision for the child (from within its own resources) Objectives: [Set out here the objectives for the child which the special educational provision should aim to meet.] Part 4: Placement The name of the school identified by the authority together with parents/child's preference if different Part 5: Non-educational needs Part 6: Non-educational provision Detail provision and objectives Part 7: Monitoring of special educational provision (part 3) and non-educational provision (part 6) Appendices Advice from all sources including child or parent		

Appendix 2: Issues Competent for Consideration by Tribunals Across the Four UK Jurisdictions

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
A decision by a local authority not to carry out an EHC needs assessment or re-assessment.	A decision not to carry out a statutory assessment – from young person or parent or school.	A decision not to comply with a request to establish whether a child or young person has additional support needs requiring a co-ordinated support plan. The decision of the authority to refuse a request from a parent or young person to review the co-ordinated support plan.	A decision by a or local authority as to whether the child or young person has ALN.
A decision by a local authority that it is not necessary to issue an EHC plan following an assessment.	A decision not to make a Statement – following the service of an Article 17(1) Notice or an Article 21(5) Notice (child under 2), whichever is appropriate.	A decision to prepare a co-ordinated support plan. A decision not to prepare a co-ordinated support plan.	In the case of a young person, a decision by a local authority as to whether it is necessary to prepare and maintain an IDP.
The description of a child or young person's SEN specified in an EHC plan. The special educational provision specified. The school or other institution or type of school or other institution (such as a mainstream school/college) specified in the plan or that no school or other institution is specified.	A decision relating to the content of a statement.	The information contained in the co-ordinated support plan.	The ALP in an IDP, or the fact that ALP is not in an IDP, including whether the plan specifies that ALP should be provided in Welsh. The description of a person's ALN in an IDP. The provision included in an IDP by a local authority or the fact that provision under those sections is not in a plan. The school named in an IDP for the purpose of admitting a child to a named institution, or if no school is named in an IDP for the purpose of admission.
An amendment to these elements of the EHC plan.	A decision in the form of a completed statement or completed amended statement.		A refusal to decide a matter on the basis that there is no material change in needs or no new information that materially affects the decision.
A decision by a local authority not to amend an EHC plan following a review or re-assessment.	A decision not to amend a statement.		A decision by the local authority not to revise an IDP where the local authority has been asked by a child, child's parent, or young person to reconsider an IDP maintained by a maintained school.

Continued on the following page

Appendix 2: Issues Competent for Consideration by Tribunals Across the Four UK Jurisdictions continued

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
A decision by a local authority to cease to maintain an EHC plan.	A decision to cease a Statement.	A decision to discontinue a co-ordinated support plan following a review.	A decision to cease to maintain an IDP.
			A decision by the local authority not to take over responsibility for an IDP, which is maintained by a school, where it is requested to do so by a child or their parent, a young person or the governing body of that school.
	A decision not to substitute the name of a school with one requested by the relevant party		
		A decision to continue a co-ordinated support plan following a review.	
		A failure to meet the timescales for preparing the co-ordinated support plan.	
		The failure of the authority to review the co-ordinated support plan by the expiry date (ie 12 months from the date it was prepared) or within the timescale set by regulations.	
		The failure by the education authority to provide, or make arrangements for the provision of, the additional support contained in a co-ordinated support plan which is necessary for the child or young person to achieve their educational objectives.	

Appendix 3: Notes on the Education Statistics used in this Report

General

Information on numbers of pupils, and their characteristics, is heavily dependent on the quality of data recorded by schools, particularly at the time of enrolment. National collations subject the information they receive to quality assurance processes. Those processes however cannot completely compensate for the fact that the whole system relies on information gathered from a diverse and large number of locations the practices and priorities within which may differ. Those locations themselves are to some degree reliant on parents accurately and willingly disclosing information. An example of the data limitation imposed by this last condition is provided by the large numbers of parents in Scotland who are prepared to disclose that they have a connection with the Armed Forces but who do not disclose any further details.

Data collection exercises evolve over time as practitioners learn from experience identifying anomalies and refining systems. Definitions also change – an obvious example is the recent change in definition of children with special educational needs to additional learning needs in Wales.

National differences

When attempting to work with data from the four UK jurisdictions used in this study the task is complicated by the fact that there is no common format for presenting the statistics. Each nation uses a different presentation method. Thus, for example, England provides an interactive tool while Scotland presents comprehensive spreadsheets. Where tools are provided, or where a nation has already processed some of the data, or where only certain years' data appears the exercise becomes constrained by how the information has been presented. Where there has been some pre-processing it is not always clear which groups of children have been included or excluded.

This situation is compounded by issues which are intrinsic to each national system. Not the least of these is that the school censuses take place at different times of year:

- England: has three census dates – October, January, and May;
- Northern Ireland: October;
- Scotland: September; and
- Wales: January.

The data across the UK is therefore not a snapshot at a particular point of time. Even at a basic level there are issues of comparability which are not obvious to the unwary. In England children typically experience 6 years of primary school education and up to 7 years at secondary school; in Scotland children spend 7 years at primary school and 6 years in secondary school. Data in Wales includes figures for middle schools. Therefore, even a simple comparison of numbers of pupils in primary (or secondary) schools between nations is not straightforward.

The ADES annual data collection exercise

The ADES annual data collection exercise takes place as a free-standing project independent of the Scottish Government's school census. It relies on a separate application for information to each of Scotland's 32 local authorities each of which make an individual return using a standardised proforma. This data is then subjected to checking and quality assurance. There are, however, acknowledged sources of error, including:

- Children in early years settings will be under-recorded since these establishments are not fully integrated into local authority and national management information systems.
- Parents who are veterans or who work at bases where there are particular security considerations may not wish to declare their armed forces status.
- Schools and some authorities may not be prioritising data collection on the armed forces population.
- Authorities adopt different conventions to suppress data on small numbers.

Implications

The limits of the data on the pupil population must be understood. The published statistics are the best available information. They give a broad picture of the pupil population. It is possible to make some broad and general statements based on this information. Care does require to be taken at the detailed level however. Certainly, in comparing some datasets between jurisdictions there does require to be a broader understanding of the actual structural differences between systems and their implications.

Appendix 4: Analysis of Children with Additional Support Needs at Authority Level: 2023/2024

	Pupils with additional support needs			All Pupils	Percentage with ASN
	Secondary	Primary	Total		
Aberdeen City	5,014	5,314	10,328	26,032	39.7
Aberdeenshire	8,485	9,363	17,848	36,403	49.0
Angus	2,819	1,974	4,793	14,919	32.1
Argyll and Bute	1,853	1,624	3,477	9,867	35.2
City of Edinburgh	11,883	12,194	24,077	53,208	45.3
Clackmannanshire	1,082	1,138	2,220	6,527	34.0
Dumfries and Galloway	3,619	3,542	7,161	18,339	39.0
Dundee City	3,673	3,058	6,731	18,273	36.8
East Ayrshire	2,188	2,224	4,412	15,624	28.2
East Dunbartonshire	2,536	1,786	4,322	17,369	24.9
East Lothian	2,817	2,656	5,473	15,117	36.2
East Renfrewshire	2,472	1,922	4,394	17,640	24.9
Eilean Siar	568	565	1,133	3,217	35.2
Falkirk	3,998	3,179	7,177	21,282	33.7
Fife	10,620	6,521	17,141	49,165	34.9
Glasgow City	15,194	13,578	28,772	70,294	40.9
Highland	7,078	5,908	12,986	30,172	43.0
Inverclyde	1,837	1,562	3,399	9,494	35.8
Midlothian	2,709	2,671	5,380	14,028	38.4
Moray	2,693	2,365	5,058	12,133	41.7
North Ayrshire	3,284	3,129	6,413	17,210	37.3
North Lanarkshire	5,838	2,499	8,337	47,193	17.7
Orkney Islands	696	458	1,154	2,777	41.6
Perth and Kinross	3,366	2,846	6,212	17,948	34.6
Renfrewshire	4,112	3,385	7,497	23,733	31.6
Scottish Borders	2,905	2,397	5,302	14,180	37.4
Shetland Islands	628	677	1,305	3,229	40.4
South Ayrshire	2,499	2,559	5,058	14,003	36.1
South Lanarkshire	7,146	6,573	13,719	45,483	30.2
Stirling	2,477	2,013	4,490	12,613	35.6
West Dunbartonshire	2,702	2,460	5,162	11,814	43.7
West Lothian	5,469	4,738	10,207	27,454	37.2
SCOTLAND:	134,260	116,878	251,138	696,740	36.0

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