



National Audit Office

BRIEFING FOR THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS  
DEFENCE COMMITTEE

APRIL 2013

---

---

# The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation

---

Our vision is to help the nation spend wisely.  
Our public audit perspective helps Parliament hold government to account and improve public services.

---

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending for Parliament and is independent of government. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), Amyas Morse, is an Officer of the House of Commons and leads the NAO, which employs some 860 staff. The C&AG certifies the accounts of all government departments and many other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to examine and report to Parliament on whether departments and the bodies they fund have used their resources efficiently, effectively, and with economy. Our studies evaluate the value for money of public spending, nationally and locally. Our recommendations and reports on good practice help government improve public services, and our work led to audited savings of more than £1 billion in 2011.

---



National Audit Office

---

# The education of Service children: findings of a National Audit Office consultation

Briefing for the House of Commons  
Defence Committee

April 2013

---

This memorandum has been prepared to help inform the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry into the education of Service children, its third in a series of inquiries looking at the Armed Forces Covenant.

---

---

---

## Contents

**Summary** 4

**Part One**

Introduction 7

**Part Two**

Impact of Service life on education 10

**Part Three**

Financial support for Service education 22

**Appendix One**

Methodology 26

**Appendix Two**

Experience of postings, types and highest level of education attended by children across different Services 28

This review was conducted by Diana Brady, Natalie Low, Robindra Neogi and Nigel Vinson, under the direction of Lee Summerfield

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office  
Press Office  
157–197 Buckingham Palace Road  
Victoria  
London  
SW1W 9SP

Tel: 020 7798 7400

Enquiries: [www.nao.org.uk/contact-us](http://www.nao.org.uk/contact-us)

Website: [www.nao.org.uk](http://www.nao.org.uk)

Twitter: @NAOorguk

---

# Summary

## Background

### The Defence Committee inquiry

**1** This memorandum has been prepared to help inform the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry into the education of Service children, its third in a series of inquiries looking at the Armed Forces Covenant.

**2** The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and sets out the relationship between the nation, the state and the Armed Forces. The Covenant sets out that children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other UK citizen in the area in which they live.

### The NAO consultation

**3** This memorandum is based on an online consultation of Armed Forces personnel and their families carried out by the National Audit Office. The purpose of the consultation was to gain insight, using a web-based questionnaire, into how the Covenant is working 'on the ground'. The consultation provides an illustrative (rather than representative) picture of the education experiences of Service children.

**4** This report is primarily based on a core sample of 1,000 Service parents with children currently or recently in education. The sample's Service profile broadly reflects that of the Armed Forces overall, with the majority of parents to the consultation identifying themselves as Army personnel or their spouses/partners. The consultation was also open to Service children aged 16 and over, but the number answering the questions was too small to be reported on separately. However, their views and experiences were generally in line with those reported by parents.

## Key findings from the consultation

### Impact of service life on Service children's education

**5** Service life is characterised by frequent moves to different parts of the United Kingdom or abroad. Of the 1,000 parents in the consultation sample, 96 per cent had moved at least once since their children started school, with 28 per cent saying they had moved seven times or more.

**6** Of the 956 parents who had moved since their children were at school, 42 per cent (406 respondents) said that moving home had a negative effect on their children's school performance and 47 per cent (454 respondents) that this had mixed effects. Respondents felt less negative about the impact of being in a Service family on their children's school performance. Of the 1,000 parents in the consultation sample, 25 per cent thought that being in a Service family had a negative effect and 60 per cent mixed effects on how their children did at school. The biggest concern among parents associated with Service life was the lack of continuity and stability that this had on children's education and life in general.

**7** Sixty-three per cent of parents had encountered 'major' difficulties with at least one aspect of arranging schooling for their children. The most common difficulties related to differences in the school curriculum (74 per cent reporting 'major' or 'minor' difficulties), getting a place at a new school (67 per cent) and getting service accommodation in time to apply for a school (62 per cent). Among the 300 parents of children with special educational needs, 73 per cent (or 219 respondents) reported difficulties related to their children's special educational needs.

**8** Our analysis of comments identified five main issues of concern to respondents. These centred around: differences between schools, difficulties with obtaining school places for their children; the emotional and social impact of moving; the decision to send children to private or boarding schools; and a perceived lack of understanding and support from schools.

**9** Despite difficulties with various aspects of arranging schooling for their children, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of the 1,000 parents in the consultation sample were satisfied with the overall quality of their children's education, with 32 per cent 'very satisfied' and 41 per cent 'satisfied'. Sixty-three per cent of all parents thought that they had sufficient information to make sensible decisions concerning their children's education.

## Continuity of Education Allowance and other financial support

**10** A number of Armed Forces schemes provide financial assistance to personnel for their children's education. Sixty per cent (595) of parents had received Continuity of Education Allowance and 15 per cent (146) Special Educational Needs Allowance (see paragraph 3.1). The majority of respondents who had received either of the two allowances rated them positively. Among the 595 parents receiving Continuity of Education Allowance, 56 per cent (333 respondents) rated it as 'very' good and 36 per cent (212) as 'quite' good. Of the 146 recipients of Special Educational Needs Allowance, 55 per cent (81 respondents) rated it as 'very' good and 30 per cent (44) as 'quite good'. Analysis of open-ended responses highlighted the importance of the Continuity of Education Allowance in providing a stable education for Service children. Concerns were raised over its future and any reductions in, or withdrawal of, this allowance.

**11** Seventy-two per cent of respondents were aware of the Service Premium (direct funding provided to schools by the Department for Education, see paragraph 3.8). Of the 718 respondents who were aware, 58 per cent (415 respondents) did not know how the Premium was spent. Of the 102 parents who knew how their children's school spent the Premium, the majority (80 per cent, or 82 respondents) thought that the money was 'very' or 'fairly' helpful to the Service children at the school.

# Part One

## Introduction

### Background

**1.1** In 2012, the House of Commons Defence Committee announced a new inquiry into the provision of education to children of Service personnel, its third in a series of inquiries looking at the Armed Forces Covenant.<sup>1</sup> The inquiry will report in 2013. A parallel consultation is considering the education of Service personnel.

**1.2** The Armed Forces Covenant was published in May 2011 and sets out the relationship between the nation, the state and the Armed Forces. An underlying principle is that the Armed Forces community should not be disadvantaged compared to other citizens. The Covenant has particular applicability in a number of fields, for example healthcare and housing. With respect to the provision of education to Service children, the Covenant states that:

“Children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education (including early years services) as any other UK citizen in the area in which they live. The Services should aim to facilitate this in the way they manage personnel, but there should also be special arrangements to support access to schools if a place is required part through an academic year as a consequence of posting. For personnel posted overseas, the MoD provides early years and educational facilities where the numbers support it, although the range of provision and choice may not be as great as in the UK. In certain cases assistance will be available to support children’s continuity of education, given the requirement for mobility.”

**1.3** To help inform the Committee’s inquiry, the National Audit Office carried out an online consultation aimed at Service families with children in (or previously in) education to gain insight into how the Covenant is working ‘on the ground’ through the first-hand experiences of education by Service personnel and their families. The findings are illustrative of individual experiences and may not be representative of the wider population of Service families.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first two inquiries were: Defence Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2010–2012, *The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 1: Military Casualties*, HC 762; and Defence Committee, Second Report of Session 2012-13, *The Armed Forces Covenants in Action? Part 2: Accommodation*, HC 331.

<sup>2</sup> This also means that patterns in responses between different groups (e.g. Services) in the sample may not hold true for the wider population.

## The consultation and who responded

**1.4** The online consultation was open to Service personnel, their spouses or partners, and their children aged 16 and over. It was publicised through a number of avenues including the Families Federations and British Forces Broadcasting Services. Respondents completed a web-based questionnaire which was accessible through the National Audit Office website. The online consultation was carried out from 5 to 28 February 2013. See Appendix One for a full description of the methodology.

**1.5** A total of 1,126 people responded, of whom 95 per cent (1,064) identified themselves as parents of a Service child and 3 per cent (37) as Service children. As some groups did not answer the full questionnaire,<sup>3</sup> the findings of this report are primarily based on a core sample of 1,000 Service parents with children currently in education or who had left education less than three years ago. The number of Service children answering the questions was too small to be reported on separately, although their views and experiences were generally in line with those reported by parents.

**1.6** Sixty-four per cent (637) of parents who responded to the consultation were Army personnel or their spouses/partners, 19 per cent (192) Royal Air Force parents, 12 per cent (123) Royal Navy and 4 per cent (38) Royal Marines.<sup>4</sup> This broadly reflects the percentage of personnel in each Service within the Armed Forces overall (**Figure 1**). We did not collect data on the rank of the Service personnel.

**Figure 1**  
Comparison of consultation profile with Armed Forces overall

	Consultation (%)	Armed Forces overall (%)
Army	64	58
Royal Air Force	19	22
Royal Navy	12	15
Royal Marines	4	4

### NOTES

- 1 Consultation profile based on 1,000 Service parents with children currently in education or in education within the last three years. Ten respondents did not indicate what Service they or their spouse/partner were in.
- 2 Percentages sum to 100 per cent (+ or - 1 per cent, due to rounding).

Source: National Audit Office consultation and Ministry of Defence Armed Forces Personnel Statistics available at: [www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=10&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2013-02-06&disText=2012&from=listing&topDate=2013-02-06](http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/index.php?page=48&pubType=1&thiscontent=10&PublishTime=09:30:00&date=2013-02-06&disText=2012&from=listing&topDate=2013-02-06), accessed 2 February 2013

- 3 Service parents of pre-school age children only or those who left education more than three years ago were not asked the full questionnaire. Twelve Service children were also screened out as they were either aged under 16 or had left education more than three years ago – see Appendix One for more details.
- 4 A small number of families (five in total) indicated that both parents were members of different Services. To facilitate comparative analysis, such families were only counted under the smaller service group. This reduced the number of Army respondents by three and the number of Royal Air Force respondents by two, but made little difference to the findings by Service (no change or a maximum change of one percentage point).

**1.7** The consultation covered Service families at different stages of the education system. For 37 per cent (365) of parents, their oldest child was of primary school age and for 33 per cent (329) of parents, the oldest child was of secondary school age<sup>5</sup> (Figure 7 in Appendix Two). Seventeen per cent (173) said their oldest child was aged 17-18 and 13 per cent (133) aged 19 or over.

**1.8** Service parents covered by the consultation sent their children to a range of different types of education. Most parents (85 per cent or 851) said that their children had attended state schools, but 67 per cent (671) also mentioned independent schools and 40 per cent (395) Ministry of Defence schools overseas. Children of Army parents were more likely to attend a Ministry of Defence school: of the 637 Army parents, 49 per cent (313 respondents) mentioned this, compared to 30 per cent of Royal Air Force parents (57 out of 192), and 11 per cent of Royal Navy and Royal Marine parents (13 out of 123, and 4 out of 38 respectively). Whether children in the family attended state and independent schools did not vary significantly between the Services (Figure 7).

**1.9** Fifty-nine per cent (593) of parents had been on at least one accompanied posting<sup>6</sup> overseas; 18 per cent (175) had only experienced unaccompanied postings overseas, while 23 per cent (227) had not had any overseas postings at all during their children's education years. Experiences of postings did vary somewhat between the Services particularly for the 123 Navy families. They were less likely overall to have had accompanied postings (35 per cent or 43 respondents) and more likely to have had unaccompanied postings (33 per cent or 40 respondents, Figure 7).

## This report

**1.10** This report covers findings from the consultation into education of Service children:

- a** Part Two looks at parents' view of the impact of Service life on their children's education.
- b** Part Three covers parents' experiences of financial schemes and support available to Service families.

<sup>5</sup> Broadly, primary school in England covers 4 to 11 year-olds and secondary school (up to GCSEs) 11 to 16 year-olds.

<sup>6</sup> On accompanied postings, Service personnel are officially accompanied by, and live with, their spouse or partner and any dependents; other postings are referred to as unaccompanied postings.

## Part Two

### Impact of Service life on education

**2.1** This part looks in detail at responding parents' experiences and views of their children's education while in the Armed Forces, in particular at:

- a** the impact that moving home and being in a Service family have on children's school performance;
- b** experiences of arranging schooling;
- c** concerns related to Service children's education;<sup>7</sup>
- d** overall satisfaction with the quality of children's education; and
- e** information to make decisions about children's education.

#### Impact of moving home and being in a Service family on children's school performance

**2.2** Service life is characterised by frequent moves to different parts of the UK and/or abroad; this was reflected in the experiences of respondents to this consultation.

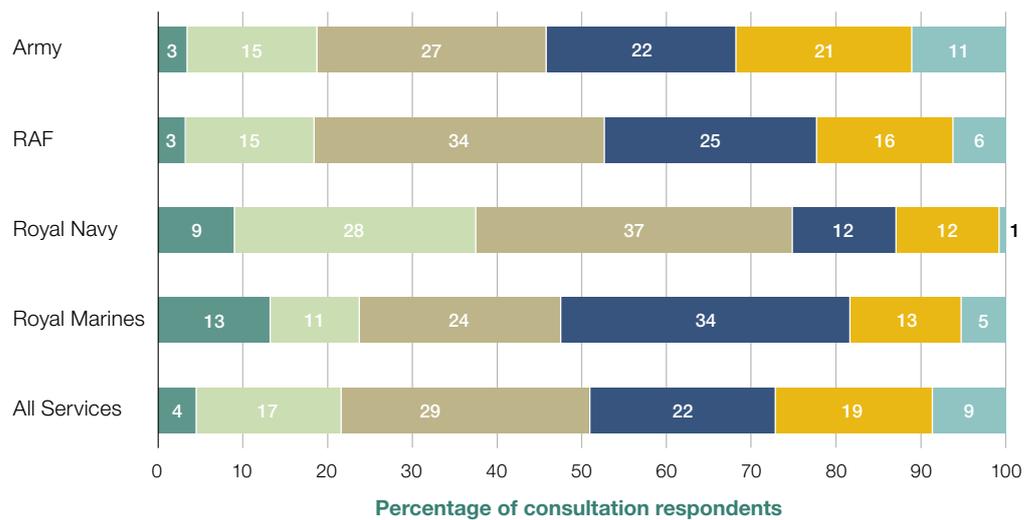
**2.3** Of the 1,000 parents in the consultation sample, almost all (96 per cent) had moved at least once since their children started school, with 28 per cent saying they had moved seven times or more (**Figure 2**). The number of moves increased with the age of the children in the family (which will also reflect the longer elapsed time that children may have been in education).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The analysis of main concerns is primarily based on 1,033 responses (from all groups, including Service parents and children, and other groups) to the question: "Overall, what would you say are your main concerns, if any, about the education of Service children?". As respondents raised similar concerns at various open-ended questions in the consultation, the analysis also includes comments to these questions: "What negative effect did moving home have on how your child(ren) did at school?"; "What kinds of negative effects have your child(ren) experienced?"; "While you/your spouse or partner have been in the Armed Forces, how, if at all, could your child(ren)'s experiences in education have been improved?" and "Do you have any other comments you want to make about the education of Service children?". Typical quotes are used to illustrate a particular experience.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the proportion of parents saying they had moved seven times or more ranged from 5 per cent among the 365 parents whose oldest child was of primary school age to 65 per cent of the 133 parents whose oldest child was aged 19 or older.

**Figure 2**

Number of home moves since children started school while in the Armed Forces, by individual service



- None
- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-10
- More than 10

**NOTE**

1 Percentages sum to 100 per cent (+ or - 1 per cent, due to rounding).

Source: National Audit Office Consultation. Base: Service parents with children currently in education or in education within the last three years: all Services n=1,000; Army n=637; Royal Air Force n=192; Royal Navy n=123; Royal Marines n=38

**2.4** Army parents were more likely to report a higher number of moves (Figure 2).<sup>9</sup>

Of the 637 Army parents, 32 per cent, or 203, said they had moved seven times or more. This compared with 13 per cent of Royal Navy parents (16 out of 123 respondents), 18 per cent of Royal Marines' parents (7 out of 38) and 22 per cent of Royal Air Force parents (43 out of 192).

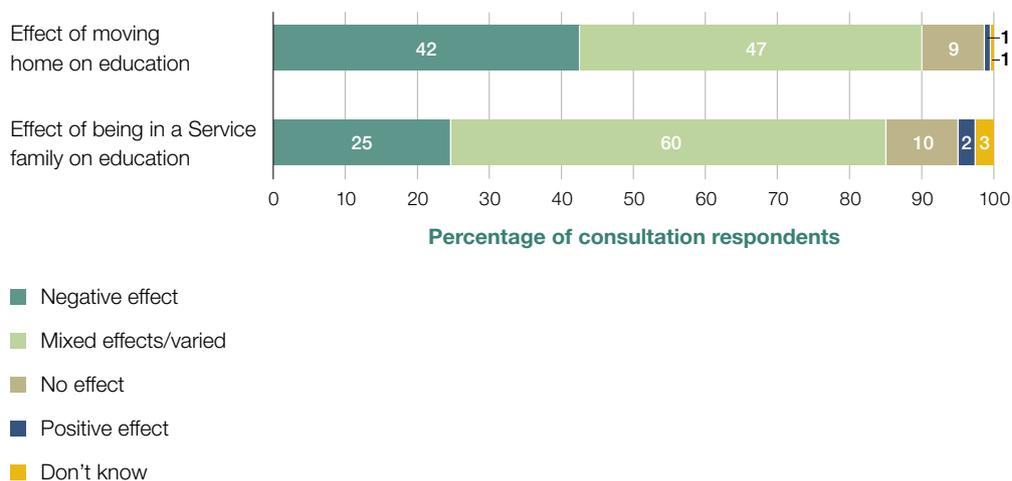
<sup>9</sup> Although Army parents were not significantly more likely to have older children (secondary school age and above) than other Service parents (see Figure 7). The proportion of Army parents whose oldest child was of primary school age was numerically higher than for other Services, but the difference was not statistically significant.

**2.5** As a result of parents’ postings, children, if they accompany their parents, have to change schools regularly, often part way through the school year. This mobility can have a detrimental effect on children’s educational attainment and emotional well-being, as highlighted in previous reports on Service children.<sup>10</sup> Of the 956 parents who had moved since their children were at school, 42 per cent (406 respondents) said that moving home had a negative effect on their children’s school performance and 47 per cent (454 respondents) said that this had mixed effects (**Figure 3**).

**2.6** The more parents in the consultation had moved, the more likely they were to say that moving had a negative effect on their children’s school performance.<sup>11</sup> Fifty-one per cent of parents (139 out of 272) who had moved seven times or more said this, compared to 33 per cent of parents (57 out of 171) moving once or twice, and 41 per cent of parents (210 out of 513) moving between three and six times.

**2.7** Royal Navy families were the least likely to report negative effects of moving on their children’s education – of the 112 Navy parents who had moved at least once, 29 per cent (32 respondents) reported negative effects compared to 42 per cent overall. This difference was observable even after taking into account the lower number of moves that Navy families reported (paragraph 2.4).

**Figure 3**  
Parents’ views on the impact of moving home and being in a Service family on children’s school performance



Source: National Audit Office consultation: Base: ‘Effect of moving home on education’ – parents who had moved (n=956); ‘Effect of being in a Service family on education’ – Service parents with children currently in education or in education within the last three years (n=1,000)

10 Defence Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2005-06, *Educating Service Children*, HC 1054; Ofsted (2011) *Children in Service families*, Reference no: 100227.

11 The question about the impact of moving on children’s school performance was only asked of parents who had moved at least once while their children were at school.

**2.8** Among movers, a higher proportion of parents of children with special educational needs said that moving home had a negative effect on their children's school performance. Of the 291 parents in this group, 51 per cent (147 respondents) said moving had a negative effect compared with 39 per cent (253) of the 649 parents who did not consider any of their children to have special educational needs.

**2.9** Respondents were less negative about the impact of being in a Service family on their children's school performance. Of the 1,000 parents in the consultation sample, 25 per cent thought that being in a Service family had a negative effect whereas 10 per cent said that this did not have any effect on their children's school performance. Most (60 per cent) thought that being in a Service family had mixed effects (Figure 3).

**2.10** Parents whose oldest child was at primary school were more likely to say that being in a Service family had negatively affected how their children did at school (28 per cent or 104 of the 365 families in this group, compared to 22 per cent, or 145 of the other 635 families whose children were at secondary school or beyond). Those whose children had attended state schools were also more likely to think being in a Service family had a negative effect: of the 851 families in this group, 26 per cent – 223 respondents – said this (compared to 15 per cent, or 23 out of the 149 parents whose children had not attended state schools).<sup>12</sup>

**2.11** In their general comments, parents raised concerns about the **general lack of continuity and stability** that Service children experienced and the impact this had on their education and social life. This was the most common issue that parents brought up:<sup>13</sup>

“The constant threat of moving our children every two years is unsettling. Our son started school in September, is about to change school in March on posting and we will only be posted for 2 years and so he will move 3 schools by age 7...”  
Service parent, Royal Navy

“The lack of geographical stability for a Service family means upheaval in the children's education. This is particularly difficult to manage if the children have special education needs which are worsened with by moving from one school to another...”  
Service parent, Army

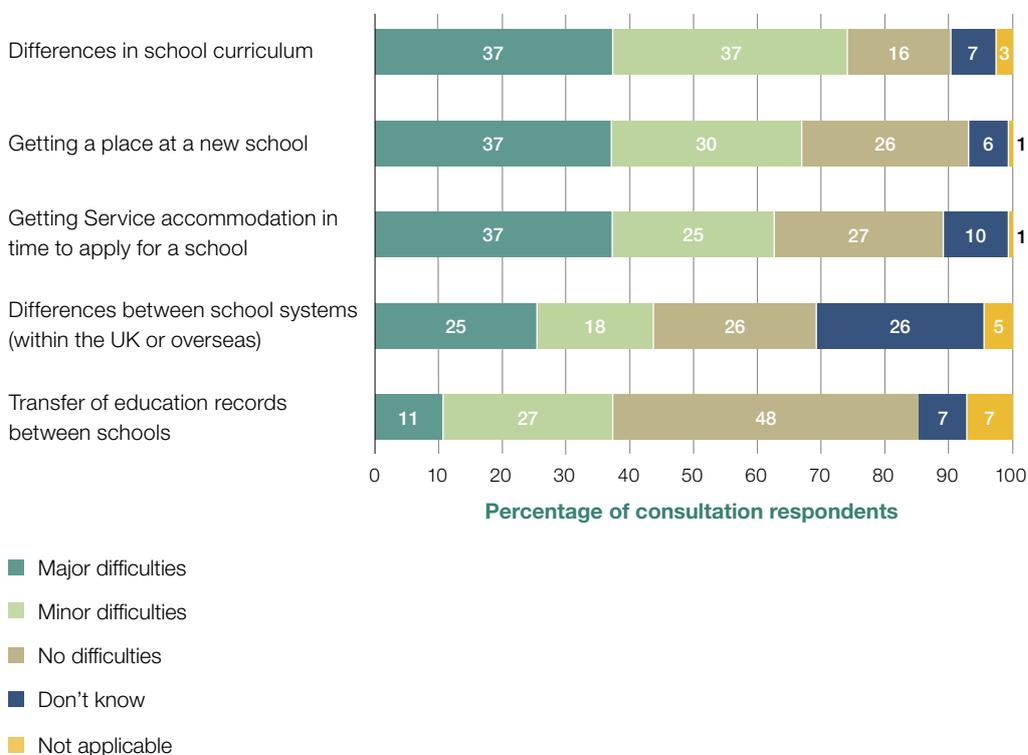
<sup>12</sup> The proportion of parents who thought that being in a Service family had a negative effect on how their children did at school did not, however, vary with the number of moves a family had experienced.

<sup>13</sup> Based on qualitative analysis – see footnote 7 for more information.

## Experiences of arranging schooling

**2.12** Sixty-three per cent (628) of parents said that they had encountered ‘major’ difficulties when arranging schooling for their children. The most common problems related to differences in school curricula (74 per cent reporting ‘major’ or ‘minor’ difficulties), followed by getting a place at a new school (67 per cent) and getting Service accommodation in time to apply for a school (62 per cent, **Figure 4**).

**Figure 4**  
Difficulties with arranging schooling for Service children



Source: National Audit Office Consultation. Base: Parents with children currently in education or in education within the last three years (n=1,000)

**2.13** Of the 300 parents of children with special educational needs, 73 per cent (219) reported some difficulties in relation to their children's special educational needs.

**2.14** Those who moved less frequently were less likely to experience difficulties with different aspects of arranging schooling for their children. For example, 50 per cent (85 out of 171) of parents who had moved home once or twice since their children started school reported difficulties with differences in the school curriculum compared with 91 per cent (247 of the 272) of parents who had moved seven times or more. Also, while 53 per cent (90 of 171) of parents who had moved once or twice reported difficulties with getting a place at a new school, 79 per cent (215 out of 272) of parents who had moved seven times or more reported difficulties with this.

**2.15** Those from Navy families were the least likely to report difficulties with arranging their children's education (and this held true even taking into account the lower number of moves reported by such families). For example, only 53 per cent (65 out of 123) of Royal Navy families reported difficulties with differences in the school curriculum and 48 per cent (59 out of 123) with getting a place for their children at a new school (compared with 74 per cent and 67 per cent of the sample as a whole).

## Concerns about education of Service children

**2.16** Our analysis of comments identified five main issues of concern to respondents. These were around: differences between schools, difficulties with obtaining school places for their children; the emotional and social impact of moving; the decision to send children to private or boarding schools; and a perceived lack of understanding and support from schools. These are described in more detail below, along with quotes representing typical responses given by respondents.

### Differences between schools

**2.17** Parents were concerned about the impact of mobility on their children's educational attainment. As a result of moving schools part way through the school year, parents reported that children often ended up repeating some topics several times while missing out on others completely:

"We often find that the children do particular topics over and over again, therefore missing out other topics. For example, my eldest daughter 'did' the Victorians three times in three schools. There is no continuity and the next school often does not bother to find out about the 'new pupil' either from their last school or from the parents."

Service parent, Army

"...Struggling to catch-up on work already done, then, in contrast, boredom and disillusionment while treading water and recovering work already done at different school with a different curriculum."

Service parent, Royal Air Force

**2.18** Parents thought that differences with the school curriculum could be particularly problematic for older pupils, leading to their GCSEs or A Levels:

“...We feel our eldest child did not achieve his full potential at GCSE level due to moving at the end of year ten.”

Service parent, Army

**2.19** Children moving from one education system to another (within the UK and/or overseas) can face additional challenges as a result of differences between the school systems, as highlighted by this parent’s experience:

“Moving from NI to Mainland schools had a detrimental effect on my sons’ education as they work on different systems and on moving back to England, he had effectively missed a year. Ever since he has had issues with phonics and basic reading skills.”

Service parent, Royal Air Force

**2.20** Respondents also commented on schools sometimes failing to properly assess children upon arrival in their new school. This was particularly worrying for parents of gifted children or those with special educational needs:

“...Schools FAIL repeatedly to appropriately assess abilities of children. My son was tested at KS3 for English as that of a 17.5 year old and set targets for between 5-12 year olds in line with the class he’d been set! There was no space in an appropriate class apparently so he was essentially told to work to a lower level than he was capable of. He was placed in a German ASDAN class in year 8 when he has learned French since reception...”

Service parent, Army

“That it always takes so long for the school to get organised with ability levels and when we moved this time it took 10 weeks before the school helped my daughter who is query dyslexic. During reading time she had to sit in a corner and draw bunnies. School said this was because it took so long to learn about new children.”

Service parent, Army

**2.21** Variation in schools’ teaching styles was also highlighted as adding additional pressure on how Service children adapt and cope in their new schools:

“The pressure placed upon Service children to conform to the new and/or different teaching expectations of the different schools they are placed in. This can be found in young children learning to write (differing writing styles between schools) through to high school pupils having to catch up very quickly with differing syllabus.”

Service parent, Royal Air Force

## Difficulties with obtaining school places for their children

**2.22** Parents were also concerned about difficulties with obtaining a place for their children at a good or preferred school upon moving to a new location. Respondents felt frustrated over the lack of spaces in good schools in the areas they moved to, particularly when moving part way through the school year, and being forced to send their children to less desirable schools:

“...When moving house, the only school places often available are in ‘sink’ schools or a long way away or your children are split up.”

Service parent, Royal Air Force

**2.23** A number of comments raised specific concerns about the quality of education in schools run by the MoD’s Service Children’s Education organisation overseas:

“Service Schools overseas were a mixed bag in terms of quality of teachers, school facilities and attitudes of other children.”

Service parent, Army

**2.24** In addition, parents commented on the difficulties with getting Service accommodation in time to apply for a school:

“My child’s education doesn’t seem to be a priority when re-locating. Found out posting address in the middle of Christmas holidays. School admission forms had to be on the [...]th Jan. That gave us seven days to contact schools and make a choice from 300 miles away.”

Service parent, Anonymous

## Emotional and social impact of moving

**2.25** Parents also expressed concerns about the pressure that geographical mobility exerted on their children’s social and emotional well-being and ultimately school performance. Parents were concerned that their children constantly had to leave old friends behind and make new friends, with some children experiencing more problems trying to ‘fit in’ and forming new friendships than others. This was also the main source of concern among the Service children who responded to the consultation:

“They struggled to make new friends and this affected how well they settled. Also they have felt resentment at having to move and leave behind good friends they have already made. All of this has in turn affected how well they have applied themselves at school.”

Service parent, Army

“I have been to lots of primary schools before I was sent to boarding school. I was finding it hard to make new friends again and again but since going to boarding school I have made friends that I will have for the rest of my schooling.”

Service child, Army

## Choosing to go private or board

**2.26** Two-thirds (67 per cent) of the parents responding to the consultation had sent their children to private school at some point. Parents commented that the decision to go private was not easy as it could involve a considerable financial burden.<sup>14</sup> Where this involved sending children to boarding school, separation was difficult for both parents and children:

“My child is now in boarding school so the negative impacts have been minimised. That said, the impacts on the wider family of having to board should not be ignored. Boarding has been a decision based on a balance of achieving continuity in education against the ‘loss’ of our child from the family home – a significant concern that has produced immense pressure.”

Service parent, Army

“The availability of school places in the major garrison areas is challenging. When posted to [...] the only offer we were given was in a failing school, this was unacceptable and resulted in my son going into private education for the first two years of primary education. This was at my own expense and financially crippling.”

Service parent, Army

## Lack of understanding or support from schools

**2.27** Parents perceived there was a lack of understanding and support for Service children in some schools. Parents commented that schools did not understand the unique issues that Service children experienced and more support was needed to help them settle in and achieve their full potential at school:

“There is a lack of knowledge among staff of the mood changes experienced by Service children when their parents deploy. A child will be upset or irritable and some teachers see this as the child misbehaving rather than the turmoil that they are experiencing.”

Service parent, Royal Navy

“A lot of the teachers in the schools that feed garrison families do not understand the transient lifestyle of the forces and how difficult it can be for a child. The standard of education is so inconsistent and schools vary from place to place. You may come from an outstanding school to a school with a really bad reputation so the continuity is disrupted.”

Service parent, Army

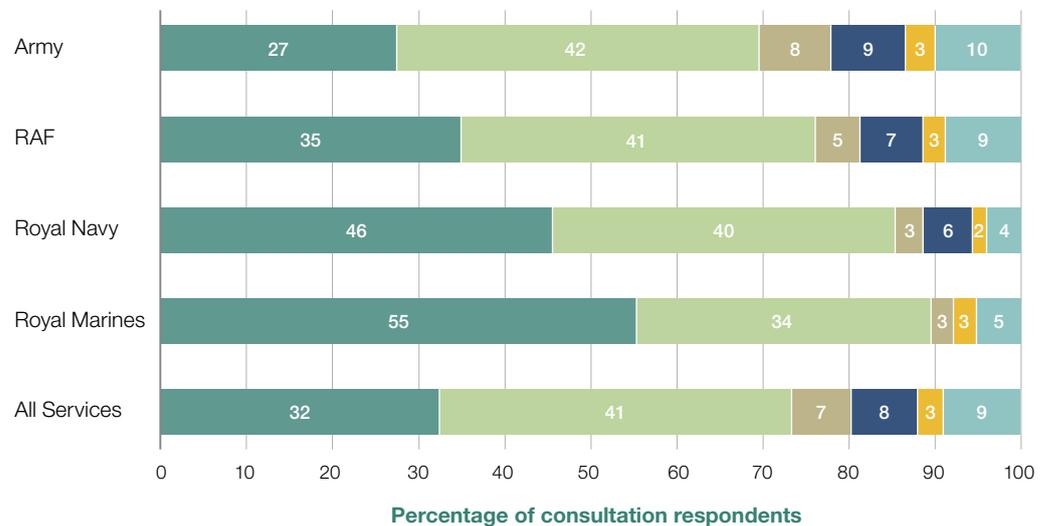
<sup>14</sup> Financial assistance for boarding school fees is available to all ranks through the Continuity of Education Allowance scheme (see paragraph 3.1), but this does not cover all fees and will not be available in all circumstances (e.g. for unaccompanied postings).

## Overall satisfaction with the quality of children’s education

**2.28** Despite difficulties with various aspects of arranging schooling for their children, nearly three quarters (73 per cent) of parents were satisfied with the overall quality of their children’s education, with a third (32 per cent) ‘very satisfied’ and 41 per cent ‘satisfied’. A tenth (11 per cent), however, were ‘dissatisfied’, or ‘very dissatisfied’ (**Figure 5**).

**Figure 5**

Parents’ satisfaction with the overall quality of their children’s school education, by Service



- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Varies too much to say

**NOTE**

1 Percentages sum to 100 per cent (+ or -1 per cent, due to rounding).

Source: National Audit Office Consultation. Base: Service parents with children currently in education or in education within the last three years: all – (n=1,000; Army n=637; RAF n=192; Royal Navy n=123; Royal Marines n=38)

**2.29** Satisfaction was lower among families with younger children at earlier stages of their education. Parents whose oldest child was of primary school age were the least satisfied – 63 per cent of these parents (230 out of 365) were satisfied compared with 79 per cent of parents (503 out of 635) whose oldest child was of secondary school age or older. Satisfaction also varied by the type of school children attended: parents whose children had attended MoD schools overseas were the least satisfied (66 per cent, 262 out of 395 parents), while parents whose children had attended private or independent schools were the most satisfied (78 per cent, 523 out of 671 parents). Parents of children with special educational needs were also less likely to say that they were satisfied compared with parents who did not consider their child to have special educational needs – 68 per cent (203 out of 300) versus 76 per cent (521 out of 683 parents).

**2.30** Those serving in the Royal Navy and the Royal Marines (or their spouses/partners) were more likely to say that they were satisfied – 85 per cent (105 out of 123 parents) and 89 per cent (34 out of 38) respectively. Army parents, on the other hand, were the least satisfied (70 per cent, 443 out of 637).<sup>15</sup>

### Information to make decisions about children’s education

**2.31** The majority (63 per cent) of parents responding to the consultation agreed that they had enough information to make sensible decisions about their children’s education. However, 17 per cent (171 parents) disagreed with this, and 19 per cent (189) neither agreed nor disagreed.

**2.32** Parents with children in private schools were more likely to agree with this: 68 per cent (456 out of 671) of parents agreed compared with 53 per cent (174) of the 327 parents whose children did not go to private school. There was no significant variation between different Services on this question.

**2.33** Respondents identified a number of areas where additional information would be useful, in particular:

- **more localised information on schools**, such as how many places were available, how many Service children attended the school or what the school did to support Service children. As many parents were unable to physically visit schools before applying, they thought it would be useful to get views from other Service parents in addition to information from Ofsted reports<sup>16</sup> or other sources:

“As well as the school’s prospectus, first hand personal knowledge from other Service families using the school would be useful. The school is biased whereas parents will tell you exactly what to expect from it.”

Service parent, Army

<sup>15</sup> These patterns by Service held true even after taking into account other factors such as age of children. Satisfaction with the overall quality of education was not significantly associated with the number of moves a family had experienced.

<sup>16</sup> Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) inspects and regulates services which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. Inspection reports are available from Ofsted’s website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report).

- more details about **differences between different schools and school systems:**

“I had no information whatsoever about the Scottish education system, I am still very confused about the cut-off birth dates for when a child has to commence schooling, the deferment of schooling, the exam system and numerous other points. I have no idea who to ask for help as the independent school I have chosen is most unhelpful.”

Service parent, Royal Navy

“How the new school syllabus falls in line with their previous school.”

Service parent, Army

- more about the **pros and cons of boarding and sources of financial support for this**, including the Continuity of Education Allowance provided by the Armed Forces (see paragraph 3.1):

“Information is vital when initially starting out in the education system and when deciding to send children to boarding school. This is the time when more info would have been useful.”

Service parent, Army

“Grants available or bursaries for Service families. There is limited information at private schools.”

Service parent, Royal Marines

- more details – and advanced notice – on the **location and timings of their next posting** to allow for better planning of their children’s education:

“More notice of the next posting, so time to investigate local schools and standards. This would give more time for financial planning if a local state school was not a suitable option.”

Service parent, Army

“To know how long a posting is going to be, so that we can plan properly for our children’s education...”

Service parent, Royal Air Force

## Part Three

### Financial support for Service education

**3.1** A number of Armed Forces schemes, detailed below, provide financial assistance to Service personnel for their children's education. The **Continuity of Education Allowance** (CEA) is available primarily to personnel of all ranks serving on accompanied postings with their spouse/family. The allowance provides part-payment of boarding school fees, with the aim of providing a more stable education for Service children. If children in receipt of the Continuity of Education Allowance are found to have special educational needs, the **Special Educational Needs Allowance** (SENA) is available to cover the cost of additional lessons to support the child. In addition, since 2011, an **Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme** (AFBSS) has been available to provide support for further and higher education to children whose parents died in Service (and where this was attributable to their Service).

**3.2** This part looks at:

- a** respondents' use of, and satisfaction with, the financial schemes available to support Service families; and
- b** respondents' awareness of the Service Premium funding provided to schools (see paragraph 3.8 for details) and its perceived use and helpfulness for Service children.

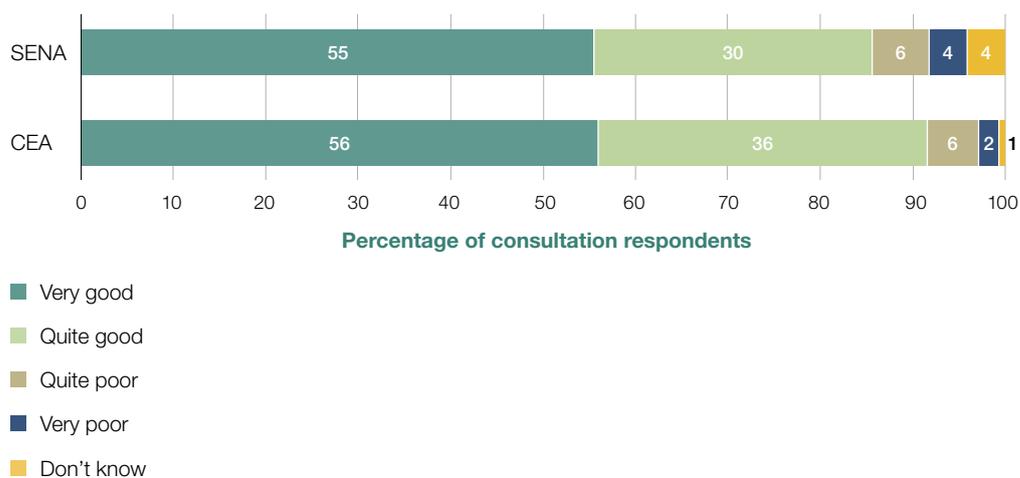
#### **Respondents' use of, and satisfaction with, financial schemes**

**3.3** Sixty per cent of parents (595) said that they had received Continuity of Education Allowance and 15 per cent (146) received Special Educational Needs Allowance. None of the respondents received support from the Armed Forces Bereavement Scholarship Scheme.

**3.4** Of the 386 respondents who had not received financial support from any of the three financial schemes, around half (52 per cent or 199 respondents) said that the schemes were not applicable to their children, 10 per cent (40) did not want to apply for them and another 10 per cent (37) did not need any support. However, 24 per cent (94 respondents) said that they did not know about these schemes.<sup>17</sup>

**3.5** Of the 595 parents who received Continuity of Education Allowance, 56 per cent (333 respondents) rated it as ‘very’ and 36 per cent (212) as ‘quite’ good. Similarly, of the 146 parents who received Special Educational Needs Allowance, 55 per cent (81 respondents) rated it as ‘very’ good and 30 per cent (44) as ‘quite’ good. The proportion of recipients who rated each scheme as poor was also similar: 8 per cent for Continuity of Education Allowance and 10 per cent for Special Educational Needs Allowance (**Figure 6**).

**Figure 6**  
Parents’ rating of the financial support schemes



**NOTE**

1 Percentages sum to 100 per cent (+ or - 1 per cent, due to rounding).

Source: National Audit Office Consultation. Base: Continuity of Education Allowance – respondents who had received this support (n=595); Special Educational Needs Allowance – respondents who had received this support (n=146)

17 Respondents could give more than one reason for not using the schemes.

**3.6** Analysis of open-ended responses highlighted:

- the importance of the Continuity of Education Allowance in **providing a stable education for Service children**, although some were concerned about the difficult process/rules of getting the allowance:

“The CEA has allowed our children the continuity and security that they need in their education, particularly for the son with dyslexia. No matter where we moved, the boys have always had their friends at school and the familiarity of the staff and the establishment. This has been very important during my husband’s numerous deployments.”

Service parent, Army

“CEA remains absolutely critical if Service children are not to be disadvantaged by the regular location moves. If you want a contented serviceman/woman prepared to serve their country without distractions you need to offer something like CEA to those that need it.”

Service parent, Royal Navy

“The process to get CEA is difficult and constantly changing.”

Service parent, Army

“The CEA rules need to be relaxed. When one child is in receipt of CEA the other child(ren) should not be disadvantaged by constantly having to move to fulfil a set of very archaic and poorly thought through rules.”

Service parent, Army

- the importance of this allowance **on their decision to remain in the Armed Forces** and concerns over the future of Continuity of Education Allowance and any reductions:<sup>18</sup>

“We are happy to compromise on many things – our housing, the constant moving and the separation but we are not prepared to compromise our children’s future/education. Without CEA, remaining in the Armed Forces would be difficult for our family if not impossible.”

Service parent, Army

<sup>18</sup> Possibly as a result of changes to the Continuity of Education Allowance since 2010, some of which include no longer permitting claims for year 12 and 13 children, who have not previously been in continuous receipt of the allowance; and reviewing entitlement where the claimant’s family home has not relocated during two consecutive assignments, rather than three.

## Awareness of the Service Premium

**3.7** The Service Premium is a strand of the Pupil Premium<sup>19</sup> paid to schools in England by the Department for Education in respect of children whose parents are currently serving in the Armed Forces (with some extensions for children of parents no longer in the Armed Forces). In 2012-13, the payment was £250 per eligible child, to approximately 52,000 eligible children with a final allocation of some £13 million.<sup>20</sup> Schools have to publish details of the amount of Pupil Premium allocation they receive and how it has been spent.

**3.8** Seven in ten (72 per cent) respondents were aware of the Service Premium. Awareness was lowest among Royal Marines families (58 per cent aware, 22 out of 38) and highest among Royal Air Force families (79 per cent aware, 151 out of 192).

**3.9** However, of the 718 respondents who were aware of the Premium, only 14 per cent (102 parents) knew how their children's school spent this additional money, 28 per cent (201) said that they did not have children at state/maintained schools since April 2011 (and hence would not have had children eligible for the Service Premium), and 58 per cent (415) did not know how the Premium was spent. Of the 102 parents who knew how their children's school spent the Premium, the majority (80 per cent) thought that the money was helpful to the Service children at the school, with 41 per cent saying that it was 'very' and 39 per cent that it was 'fairly' helpful.

<sup>19</sup> The Department for Education Pupil Premium is allocated to local authorities and schools to support disadvantaged pupils. There are premia for deprivation, Service children and looked-after children. Schools themselves determine how they will spend the Premium, which is additional to their underlying budget, to support the raising of attainment for the most vulnerable pupils.

<sup>20</sup> The Service Premium rose to £300 per child for 2013-14. Estimates of eligible pupils and allocation based on Department for Education figures available at: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/schoolsrevenuefunding/a00200697/pupil-premium-2012-13](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/schoolsrevenuefunding/a00200697/pupil-premium-2012-13), accessed 28 March 2013; and: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/schoolsrevenuefunding/settlement2013pupilpremium/a00200465/schools-funding-settlement-2012-13](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/schoolsrevenuefunding/settlement2013pupilpremium/a00200465/schools-funding-settlement-2012-13), accessed 2 April 2013.

# Appendix One

## Methodology

### The online consultation

- 1** Together with Defence Committee staff, and with input from the Ministry of Defence and the Families Federation, the National Audit Office developed an online questionnaire. The main topics covered were the number of moves respondents had experienced and their impact on Service children's education; perceived impact of being in a Service family on children's school performance; various difficulties experienced while trying to arrange schooling for their children and their main concerns about Service children's education; use and rating of financial schemes available to Service families; awareness of the Service Premium, and its perceived use and helpfulness. The questionnaire included a mix of open and closed questions. Most questions had different wording for children and parents.
- 2** The questionnaire was programmed using SNAP survey software. A weblink directed respondents to a page on the NAO website with information about the consultations and link to the consultation questionnaire.
- 3** The consultation was open to Service parents and their children aged 16 and older in (or previously in) education. As the Market Research Society's Ethical Guidelines do not permit collecting responses from those under 16 without parental consent, those who identified themselves as 15 or younger were screened out. Parents with children under 16 were asked an additional question where they could raise any concerns that their children had on their behalf.
- 4** As the weblink was publicly available, other groups (primarily education providers, former Service children or future Service parents) were also able to take part and questions were included for such groups to identify in what capacity they were participating. These groups, along with parents with pre-school age children or children who left education more than three years ago, were asked a short form of the questionnaire. Respondents who wished to submit a response on behalf of an organisation were asked to contact the inquiry directly. All returns were anonymous, and it was not possible to check the credentials of those responding.

**5** Defence Committee staff facilitated publicity of the consultation and weblink through a number of avenues including the Families Federations, British Forces Broadcasting Services and websites such as the Army Rumour Service. These sources were encouraged to publicise the weblinks directly and send them out to other contacts.

**6** The consultation was open from the 5 to 28 February 2013. A total of 1,126 people responded, of whom 1,064 (95 per cent) identified themselves as parents of a Service child, 37 (3 per cent) as Service children, and 25 (2 per cent) as 'other'. Eight young people were subsequently screened out as they did not meet the age criteria and four because they had left education more than three years ago. The remaining sample of 25 Service children was too small to be reported on separately. The core sample to the consultation consisted of 1,000 parents. Service parents of pre-school age children or those who left education more than three years ago were not asked the full questionnaire.

**7** By its nature, the consultation sample is self-selecting and we cannot claim that the profile of responses is representative of any wider population. This also means that patterns in responses between different groups (e.g. Services) in the sample may not hold true for the wider population. We checked how the profile of individual Services compared between the parents responding to the consultation and Service membership in the wider population – this was broadly in line. However, we did not collect other information such as rank, so we do not know what ranks responded and how this might impact the views and experiences described in this report.

**8** We analysed responses to structured questions using the statistical analysis package SPSS. No analyses are shown based on numbers less than 30. In looking at findings for different groups, we used tests of statistical significance to ensure we only highlighted differences that were unlikely to be due to chance fluctuations. (We used Pearson's chi-square test to test the differences between groups and only highlight results that are significant at the 5 per cent level). Open comments were analysed using Excel spreadsheets. For each question, a coding framework of broad themes was developed based on initial responses, which was then applied to all answers. Due to the large numbers of comments given to the open questions, it was not possible to code all answers in detail. Instead, we coded 455 responses in detail. We then categorised all open comments using keyword searches and checked that these were (a) in line with the detailed coding already undertaken and (b) did not omit any major themes by inspecting all comments that were not categorised using the keyword search. Quotes used in the text of the report were selected based on this analysis to be illustrative of comments categorised under that theme.

## Appendix Two

### Parents' experience of postings, types and highest level of education attended by children across different Services

**Figure 7**

Experience of postings, types of education attended by children and highest education level attended by children, by Service

	Army (%)	Royal Air Force (%)	Royal Navy (%)	Royal Marines (%)	All Services (%)
<b>Experience of postings</b>					
Accompanied postings <sup>1</sup>	67	52	35	47	59
Unaccompanied postings only <sup>1</sup>	14	18	33	26	18
No overseas postings <sup>1</sup>	19	30	33	26	23
Prefer not to say	<0.5	1	–	–	1
<b>Types of education attended by children</b>					
State/maintained school	84	90	86	87	85
MoD School overseas <sup>1</sup>	49	30	11	11	40
Independent school	66	64	76	74	67
<b>Age of oldest child</b>					
Primary school age (4 to 11)	40	31	29	29	37
Secondary school age (11 to 16)	30	35	41	39	33
17 to 18	16	21	20	21	17
19 or older	14	13	10	11	13
Number of respondents	637	192	123	38	1,000

**NOTES**

- 1 Indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in this factor between services at the 5 per cent level (see Appendix One for details of the statistical testing).
- 2 Types of education attended sum to more than 100 per cent as children in the family could have attended more than one type. For all other factors, percentages sum to 100 per cent (+ or - 1 per cent, due to rounding).
- 3 The 'All Services' column includes ten respondents who chose not to indicate their or their spouse/partner's Service.

Source: National Audit Office consultation





National Audit Office

