



1. About us

The Royal British Legion is at the heart of a national network that supports our Armed Forces community through thick and thin – ensuring their unique contribution is never forgotten. We were created as a unifying force for the military charity sector at the end of the First World War, and remain one of the UK's largest membership organisations. We are the largest welfare provider in the Armed Forces charity sector, providing financial, social and emotional support, information, advice, advocacy and comradeship to Service personnel, veterans and their dependants. In 2016, we responded to over 1 million requests for help, more than ever before, please visit www.britishlegion.org.uk

2. Introduction

The Legion is grateful for the opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry into the Welsh Government's approach of targeting funding on particular cohorts of pupils, primarily disadvantaged pupils through the Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG).

The Legion will be focusing comments on support for children of members of the Armed Forces. We recognise that some of this cohort may qualify for support under the Pupil Deprivation Grant and will be receiving this along with their non-Service children peers. However, many of this cohort may not be eligible for such support, but may have other needs around wellbeing, as a result of a parent serving in the Armed Forces.

3. Service children

The children of members of the Armed Forces face unique circumstances and challenges as a result of their parental employment and it is vital the right support is put in place for these children and their families. The high mobility and frequent house and school moves that can come with a military career can be destabilising for all the family, especially children; and having a parent away from home on deployment, sometimes in dangerous situations, can have a major impact on a child's wellbeing and this is something that has been highlighted via the WLGA-hosted SSCE Cymru project ¹.

A 2011 Ofsted report entitled '*Children in Service families*' into the quality of education provision for Service children stated that: '*National data shows that, in general, most Service children educated in mainstream maintained schools in England and overseas, attain as well*

¹ <http://www.sscecymru.co.uk/home/>

as or better than their non-Service peers at the end of every key stage.² This includes those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or those learning English as an additional language. This suggests that most children and young people make good progress in overcoming barriers to learning associated with Service life and respond to the additional interventions and support offered to them³.

The report also found extensive evidence of the disruption to the social and emotional wellbeing of Service children, noting that almost all the Service children interviewed said they did not like their regular moves between schools, were upset by school moves, and that it disrupted their friendships. The study also found that some schools reported a visible deterioration or changes in the behaviour of Service children when a parent was deployed, as anxiety and stress took hold.

The Legion's work in this area⁴ and that of the SSCE Cymru project has shown that the greatest potential impact on Service children is to their emotional wellbeing. It is during times when a parent is deployed on an operational tour, training or posting abroad that Service children feel the most anxious and a heavy emotional toll is placed upon them. Work by the SSCE Cymru project in 2015⁵ which sought feedback from schools themselves found that Service children can face disruption to their social and emotional wellbeing. The schools reported that children face problems such as:

- Difficulties settling into a new school;
- Difficulties making friends;
- Feeling isolated;
- Feeling worried about a parent who is on deployment.

The Legion's work in this area has therefore focused on improving the wellbeing support that Service children may require, and this has resulted in the Legion investing in the production of new best practice guides for Supporting Service Children in Schools. These guides – with specific versions for Wales and England – outline the support available for Service children and families along with guidance for schools and local authorities on how they can identify Service children and ensure any issues they may be facing can be identified with appropriate action being taken.

4. Response to consultation

The use of targeted funding at certain groups is clearly an important way of supporting learning for pupils who may face some disadvantage in achieving their learning goals. The Legion has some experience of such targeted funding, in the specific area of children of Armed Forces personnel, and we believe it is worth outlining how this can help reduce the disadvantages Service personnel may experience and provide the additional care they may need, due to their unique circumstances.

² Attainment is the term used for the standard of pupils' work generally shown by test and examination results. National data are published on the Department for Education website; www.education.gov.uk

³ Children in Service families, Ofsted, 2011: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-service-families>

⁴ Supporting Service Children in School in Wales, The Royal British Legion, 2017

⁵ Service children in Education in Wales: A study of available data on numbers and provision. WLGA, SSCE Cymru, MoD. 2015

The Service Pupil Premium

The Service Pupil Premium (SPP) is a funding stream provided by the Department for Education directly to schools in England, to help fund the provision of measures to reduce the disadvantages Service children may face and to provide the crucial additional pastoral support these children may require as a result of their frequent mobility or during periods when a parent is deployed. The SPP provides £300 per pupil on an annual basis. In order to receive the SPP, schools must record the number of eligible pupils on the January school census. For further information please see the Legion's Service children in Education guide (England): <http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/support-for-service-children/>

There is currently no SPP in Wales, leaving service children in Wales disadvantaged compared to their peers elsewhere in the UK. In England, the SPP has provided important practical support to service children in education. Schools in Wales should have access to a similar fund, which would complement the work of the Supporting Service Children in Education Cymru (SSCE Cymru) project and ensure resources are available to fund pastoral care for the approximately 2,500 Service children who currently attend school in Wales. The Legion's 2016 Wales manifesto called for the introduction of a Service Pupil Premium for Wales and highlighted the fact that Service children are not currently identified in the Pupil Level Annual School census (see below).

Education Support Fund

The Education Support Fund (ESF) is a Ministry of Defence (MoD) fund that assists publicly funded schools in mitigating the effects of mobility or deployment on their service communities. Since 2011 the fund has provided over £1.7 million to projects in Wales, supporting innovative work to support Service children. Examples have included funding support workers, after school clubs and classroom equipment.

The fund is due to cease in 2018 and the Legion has raised concerns about the potential impact in Wales, especially given the lack of a SPP in Wales.

Grants supporting children in Wales

The Legion recognises the targeted funding put in place by the Welsh Government to support children in Wales, such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant. In its evidence to the Defence Select committee in June 2013, the Welsh Government stated:

'There is no Service Pupil Premium in Wales. However, there is support available for children of Service families in schools in Wales through our School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. These grants are the Welsh Government's principal means of providing financial support for our three national priorities for schools: improving standards in literacy; improving standards in numeracy, and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Responding to the challenges we face in improving our educational outcomes in Wales by taking action in isolation on different parts of the education system is counter to the aims of the grants. All Service children in Wales, including those that come to Wales in the future, will benefit from the funding available to schools through these grants, as will each pupil in Wales.'

(we are) pleased to inform the Defence Committee that generous funding from the MOD's Support Fund for Schools with Service Children is already helping several Welsh schools support Service children'⁶.

Whilst recognising that some Service children will indeed benefit from the additional support provided by targeted funding such as the PDG, we are not aware of data that demonstrates the numbers of Service children directly benefitting from such support. It is also clear that due to the criteria of the PDG, not all Service children would qualify for that funding and therefore there remains a gap in terms of targeted funding being available for Service children as a group.

Data and identification

Targeting support for Service children in Wales would require reliable information regarding the number of Service children in Wales. The 2011 census found there were 2,486 Service children in Wales where the Household Reference Person (HRP) stated that they were serving in the Armed Forces. It should be noted that the census failed to capture children where the non-HRP is in the Armed Forces.

Due to the lack of knowledge regarding Service children in Wales, the Legion has also called for the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) to be changed to include a requirement that Service children be identified by schools. This would help provide a reliable data set on the numbers of Service children and allow schools to identify this cohort and address any wellbeing and support needs.

The Legion acknowledges that schools aim to meet the support needs of all pupils regardless of background and the Pupil Deprivation Grant and other schemes will help provide that support. However, the Legion is not aware of any figures that demonstrate how many Service children have been supported via the PDG which indicates that this data is not recorded.

Key points:

- The Legion would like to see targeted funding for Service children in Wales, which schools could access in order to provide tailored support. The success of ESF funding in Wales demonstrates the appetite amongst schools and the need for such work. Clearly such work has not been funded via existing funding streams if schools in Wales have accessed £1.7m from the MoD since 2011 to provide focused support for Service children.
- The Legion believes that the lack of an identification requirement in PLASC of Service children is preventing schools from knowing who their service pupils are and being able to support any specific issues they may be facing due to their experiences of Service life.

⁶ Available here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/586/586we08.htm>