



Military Service Children in York and North Yorkshire: Qualitative research study

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Executive Summary

York St John University and Inspiring Choices worked together to investigate perceptions of higher education in military service children and what support they would like to make higher education more accessible to them. Military service children from four schools (Richmond, Fulford, Huntington and Joseph Rowntree) all took part in a York St John University campus day where they engaged in a Higher Education activity, were given a campus tour, had lunch in the university canteen and participated in either a focus group or a poster session. The children were asked about their experiences of being a service child in secondary education, and their plans for further and/or higher education.

Three main questions emerged from the analysis of the findings:

1. How can schools and universities help military service children?
2. What do military service children know about higher education?
3. What are the barriers for military service children when accessing higher education?

The findings from this research demonstrated the utility in those sessions for the pupils, consequently Inspiring Choices and York St John University will continue to offer further support for military service pupils in the future in the form of campus visits and in-school workshops.

Introduction

In 2016, the Office for Students identified military service children as underrepresented in higher education after research from University of Winchester suggested that this cohort have experiences that may affect access¹. This research also suggested that military service children are less likely than their peers to go on to higher education. In York and North Yorkshire, 2020 census data tells us that there are 4,126 military service children aged 0-16.

In Autumn 2022, Inspiring Choices and York St John University's widening participation team collaborated to run a series of campus visits for military service pupils.

The purpose of these sessions was to explore the choices and perceptions of young people who grow up within a military service background, focusing on attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way which is not possible through other methods of research, such as surveys. The findings will inform Uni Connect

¹ Source: Further and Higher Progression for Service Children: Research Paper, Judith Mccullouch, Michael Hall

partners, teachers, policy makers, and other stakeholders involved in planning and delivering Higher Education outreach.

The aims of the sessions were:

- to introduce the students to Higher Education
- to identify potential barriers or problems for military service children in accessing Higher Education
- to identify what support could be offered by Higher Education providers to the students and their peers

Method of Delivery

Initially, up to 25, year 11 military service pupils from Richmond School were invited to a campus visit day at York St John University. Following on from this, the same number of military service pupils were invited for campus visits from three additional schools: Joseph Rowntree, Fulford and Huntington. These schools were contacted because they have military service children enrolled.

Schools were asked to select a suitable date for the visit, with a preference stated for all visits to take place before Christmas. Inspiring Choices funded the cost of travel and catering (refreshments and lunch) for the visits, with the York St John Widening Participation team funding cost of student ambassadors.

Final dates and details of pupils attending were as follows:

- Richmond School: Wednesday 21 September 2022; 18 pupils, year 11
- Fulford School: Thursday 17 November 2022; 18 pupils, year 9-11
- Huntington School: Tuesday 22 November 2022; 9 pupils, year 11
- Joseph Rowntree School: Tuesday 29 November 2022; 10 pupils, year 7-11

The programme for Richmond School differed from that of the other three schools. Examples of each programme have been included in the appendices. The Richmond School visit began with an introductory presentation on the benefits of Higher Education, including an activity that involved working in small groups to sort items relating to university and items relating to school into a Venn diagram ("School vs. Uni"). Pupils were then taken on a campus tour by student ambassadors, finishing their morning session with a break for lunch. The focus groups ran in the afternoon.

Three focus groups took place, with 5 or 6 pupils in each. They were led by Rachael, who had delivered the morning session, Laura and Rida. Questions for the focus groups had been previously agreed upon and were divided into four categories: Further Education, Higher Education, Information and Barriers. The questions have been included in the appendices. Participants were reminded that although the session was

being recorded, all answers would be confidential and anonymised. The focus groups lasted for around 30 minutes.

Subsequent to the Richmond School visit day, it was decided that focus groups were not the most effective method of encouraging young people to divulge information or share their experiences. The structure was very formal and with the exception of those in Rachael's group, the young people were meeting their facilitators for the first time. Frustratingly, the more meaningful conversations took place once the recordings had ended.

As a result, it was decided that for the remaining three visits, the afternoon session would comprise of a poster-making session. Inspiring Choices coordinators, Jack and Alex, led the session, but were also present and introduced themselves during the morning activity, so that they were known to the young people. Before the poster session began, a set of questions was handed out to the young people in worksheet format (included in the appendices), to prompt small group discussions. Many chose to record their observations. The poster-making session posed similar questions to the focus groups, and provided templates, but young people were also free to work in groups and/or record their experiences in a way that suited them. Magazines and newspapers were provided for inspiration, but many young people chose to write and/or draw the information they wished to share. Worksheets and posters were collected at the end of the session.

Findings

Three main questions arose from the thematic analysis of the posters and interview transcripts: how can schools and universities help military service children? What do military service children know about higher education? And what are the barriers in place for military service children when accessing higher education?

- The help that military service children were asking for could be broken down into help from universities and help from schools.
- The military service children wished for more support when starting at a new school; they suggested school tours and buddy schemes would be beneficial. Additionally, they felt that schools should communicate more so when a pupil moves to a new school, the new school is aware of how far along the syllabus the pupil is. Pupils also mentioned that it would be useful to have more pastoral support whereby teachers would frequently check in with the pupils, as well as pupils feeling like they had school staff that were approachable and had the time to chat to them about any worries they were facing. The option for an afterschool club specifically for military service children was frequently mentioned as a valuable way for making friends and keeping military connections. Lastly, websites that are specific to military service children and

wellbeing, as well as resources and information on universities were also voiced as useful options schools could provide.

- Furthermore, military service pupils are asking universities to help them by offering outreach opportunities such as; campus visits, financial and accommodation guidance, examples of a day in the life at university, and what the workload may be like. Young people also want to better understand what qualifications are needed for applying to university and higher education.
- Knowledge about higher education in the military service children was good, with many of the students understanding the key differences between school and university. The military service children understood that higher education has its advantages, such as opportunities for independence and responsibility, and its disadvantages such as pressure and financial cost.
- In terms of the barriers which are affecting military service children's access to higher education, 73% of responses mentioned moving as a barrier. The young people cited moving as a factor affecting their ability and desire to make friends and their ability to receive all the teaching of one subject. It is often the case that military service children may move during an academic year to a new school which may be at a different place in the curriculum, so the individual may miss part of the teaching. It is also possible that the new school may offer different GCSE or A-Level options, meaning that taught content on that subject is missed and/or disrupted.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all the participants of the focus group interviews, and poster sessions who took the time to share their knowledge and experiences with us. Also, thank you to the many people who helped to recruit participants and to set up interviews, particularly our contacts at Richmond School, Fulford School, Huntington School and Joseph Rowntree School.

A particular thank you to Rachael Glennon, Lydia Macpherson, Laura Fenwick, Rida Wahba, Alex Hargreaves and Jack Evason for their contribution in developing and evaluating these sessions.

About us

Inspiring Choices Programme

Inspiring Choices is the York and North Yorkshire partnership for the Uni Connect programme, funded by the Office for Students. Inspiring Choices is here to support young people as they make decisions about their future education and career. Our team is based at York St John University, and we work in schools and colleges across York and North Yorkshire.

We work with young people aged 14 and above and run workshops, activities and trips, all aimed at helping young people think about what they want to do in the future and how they can get there. We also offer 1 to 1 support and bespoke activities for schools and colleges.

York St John Widening Participation Team

The Widening Participation Team at York St John University works with schools, colleges and individuals to support informed decision making around education and careers. Our goal is to reduce the barriers which can deter students from accessing higher education.

We work with a range of ages, from primary school-age children to mature learners, delivering targeted projects to pupils who are statistically from backgrounds less likely to progress to higher education. We offer support, advice and guidance through a range of interactive activities and events, including workshops, presentations and visits to campus.

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Appendices

The following documents are included below:

- Onsite Visit Schedule – Huntington School
- Onsite Visit Schedule – Richmond School
- Participant Information Sheet – Richmond School
- Focus Group Questions – Richmond School
- Poster Template – Your Experience as a Military Service Child
- Your Top Tips Template



Huntington School Campus Visit

22 November 2022

10:00 Welcome and Introduction to Higher Education

A short presentation which details the plan for the day followed by an activity which introduces the concept of Higher Education and invites pupils to explore what's on offer at YSJU.

11:00 Campus Tour

Led by student ambassadors, groups of students are taken on a tour of the campus.

12:00 Lunch Break - Dining Room

12:45 Discussion Groups

Students split into smaller groups and take part in an interactive discussion about their experiences of education and future pathways and careers.

14:00 Depart



Richmond School Campus Visit

21st September 2022

10:30 Welcome and Introduction to Higher Education - DG/019

A short presentation which details the plan for the day, introduces the concept of Higher Education and invites pupils to explore what's on offer at YSJU.

11:15 Campus Tour

Led by student ambassadors, groups of students are taken on a tour of the campus.

12:00 Lunch Break - Dining Room

12:45 Discussion Groups – DG/019, DG/120, DG/102, DG/104

Students split into smaller groups and take part in an interactive discussion about their experiences of education and future pathways and careers.

14:00 Depart from DG/019

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION

You have been invited to take part in a research project exploring the choices and perceptions of young people who grow up within an Armed Forces background. Focus group research will be used to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way which is not possible through other methods of research, such as surveys. The research will inform Uni Connect partners, teachers, policy makers, and other stakeholders involved in planning and delivering HE outreach.

Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information, please contact Louisa Dobson (Programme Manager, Inspiring Choices Uni Connect, York St John University), using the contact details on the following page.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FOCUS GROUP PROJECT?

The aims of this study are to understand how the choices and perspectives of young people from a Armed Forces background, around topics such as progressing to university. In conducting this study, we are trying to gain an understanding how Uni Connect can best support learners going forward, supporting their progression into further and higher education.

WHAT WILL YOU DO IN THE PROJECT?

Part of this study involves a face-to-face focus group with young people within schools and colleges. You will be asked to take part in one focus group, with questions that will cover topics that include: your views on higher education, factors which might affect your progression in education, and what support you may need for future careers.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part in this study, but your contribution would be greatly appreciated. You will not be treated any differently, whether you choose to take part, or decide not to do so. If you do decide to take part, you may later withdraw from the study without giving a reason and without penalty.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You have been invited to take part in this project because you are at a school or college who work with the Inspiring Choices Uni Connect Programme. You will also come from an Armed Forces Background.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU IN TAKING PART?

Due to the nature of this study, there are minimal risks that may arise from your participation and there will be no preparatory requirements. If you should feel that you wish to discuss any topic areas or sensitive subjects with another, support will be available to you. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any point, without giving a reason if you so wish. You can withdraw from the project by informing me that you wish to do so via the email at the end of this sheet. If you withdraw from the research, any words used by you will be removed from the data that has been collected. You may request that the information you have provided is removed from the study by 14 days after the date of the focus group.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE INFORMATION IN THE PROJECT?

All focus groups will be audio recorded for transcribing purposes, but all answers will remain confidential. A participant number will be used for you and pseudonyms for any organisations or people that you mention in order to maintain anonymity. All data collected whilst conducting this investigation will be stored securely on the password protected Glassscubes storage system and password protected computer account, which is used for the storage of research data at Inspiring Choices, in line with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation. The information will not be shared with the outside research community; only the information used in the final report will be available for others to read.

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS INFORMATION - PLEASE ASK ANY QUESTIONS IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT WHAT IS WRITTEN IN THIS FORM.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If you are happy to take part in this project, you will be required to complete the form following this information.

It is possible that the results of this research project will subsequently be published. If this is the case, appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that all participants remain strictly anonymous.

If you do not want to be involved in the project, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for reading the information above.

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the Ethics Panel at York St John University.

RESEARCHER CONTACT DETAILS:

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Focus Group guide: (notes for facilitator in red)

Statement to read out at the beginning of the focus group/interview:

This focus group is being conducted by Inspiring Choices to explore the experiences of Young People from an Armed Forces Background. Findings from this research will be used to design and support activities for young people.

As part of this research, Inspiring Choices will be asking you questions and record your answers so we can produce reports that will detail the findings and our recommendations. We won't name any participants in those reports and will remove identifying information so that you are not identifiable as individuals.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes. This data will only be shared with the evaluation assistants who will be analysing the focus groups. Only anonymised data used in the final report will be available for the public to read. Your responses will be stored on a secure database in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). To find out more about how we use your data, you can read our Privacy Policy.

Participation in this focus group is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for up to two weeks from the date of the focus group by emailing us. In proceeding with this focus group, you are signalling that you consent to taking part and to the use of your data as outlined above.

Are there any questions?

Start recording

FURTHER EDUCATION

1. Have you thought about what you will be doing after year 11? (e.g., college, sixth form, A-level).

HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Do you know anyone who has done a degree? (Ask who)

2. Is higher education something you have considered? Why or why not?

3. Have you thought about what you would want to study?

4. Do you feel like you have the support you need to make the decision on whether to go to university?

INFORMATION

1. Where would you look for information about higher education, further training or careers?

2. What information would you like to know about higher education/studying at university? If we can provide some kind of support, what would you like it to be?

3. Have friends or family been a useful source of information about higher education or careers? How?

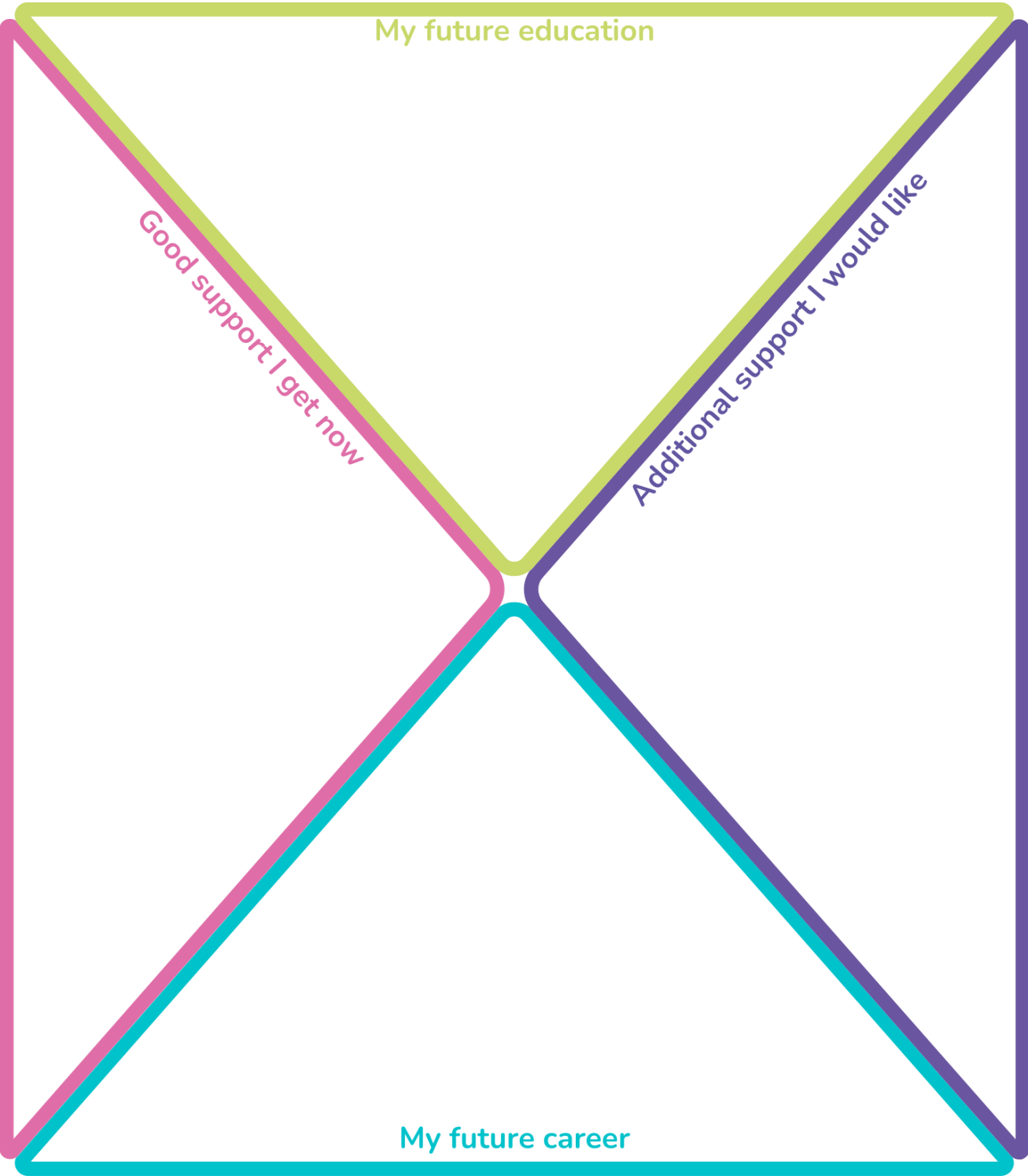
BARRIERS

1. What do you feel would be the benefits of going to university/ higher education? And what do you think the negatives of going to university would be?

2. Do you feel as a service child there have been any barriers to your education until now or your future plans?

3. Is there anything you would like to add that you haven't had a chance to say?

Your experience as a military service child



Your Top Tips!

Who do you talk to about your military connection?

Do you choose to spend time with other children from military service family? How does it help you?

How do you keep in touch with friends from previous schools?

How can schools help when you move?

How do you feel when your parent is deployed?

How can schools help and encourage you?

What does your schools do that others can do too?

Use the questions on this sheet to help you develop your poster!

Feel free to cut out the questions and make a collage.

A picture is worth a thousand words
Cut out pictures from the materials provided to help describe how you feel.