



## State boarding schools survey results

The Directorate Children & Young People (DCYP) is the professional lead within the MOD for policy and strategy relating to Service children, wherever they might be.

The Education of Service Children Change Programme (ESCCP) has been set up within the Directorate in recognition of the changes that are taking place within Defence, and other, policy which may impact upon Service children.

DCYP asked for AFF's support to look at one of the aspects of ESCCP which is: Project 1 - Improving Access to High Quality Education for Service Children in the UK. DCYP would like to get a better understanding of Service families' views on using state boarding schools (SBS). These opinions and preferences will be used to shape future MOD CEA policy.

New CEA rules state that, when applying for CEA families must demonstrate that they have considered a minimum of three schools, of which at least one of them must be an SBS. Justification must also be given for not selecting an SBS.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance for admissions to state boarding schools is:

*1.41 Boarding schools must give priority in their oversubscription criteria in the following order:*

- a) looked after children and previously looked after children;*
- b) children of members of the UK Armed Forces who qualify for Ministry of Defence financial assistance with the cost of boarding school fees;*
- c) children with a 'boarding need', making it clear what they mean by this.*

The State Boarding Schools' Association census in 2013/14 showed a maximum boarding capacity of 4,716 places nationally. Around 500 of those places go to Service children.

**AFF View:** We think it is entirely reasonable that families are encouraged to look at state boarding schools, but the MOD should continue to acknowledge that SBS might not be the right fit for every child. Many parents are looking for continuity of education from the age of eight due to high mobility and often SBS are not situated in areas which offer Service parents and their wider family's easy access.

425 people completed the survey. Of these:

- 70% (299) stated they were a member of the Army
- 8% (36) stated they were a member of the RAF
- 4% (19) stated they were a member of the Royal Navy
- 17% (71) did not specify their Service

The results below are for Army personnel, but interesting differences between the Services have been highlighted.

**Q1. Are you currently claiming CEA?**

Respondents 299

Yes 100% (299)

No 0% (0)

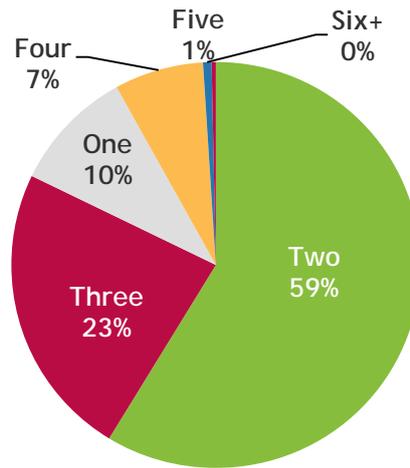
**Q2. What rank is the Service person?**

Respondents 297

Rank	% of respondents
Lieutenant Colonel	37%
Major	20%
Colonel	20%
Captain	4%
Brigadier	4%
Staff Sergeant	4%
WO2	4%
Sergeant	3%
Corporal	3%
WO1	3%
Lance Corporal	1%
Private	0.67%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant	0%

**Q4. How many children do you have?**

Respondents 298



**Q5. What age range do they belong to?**

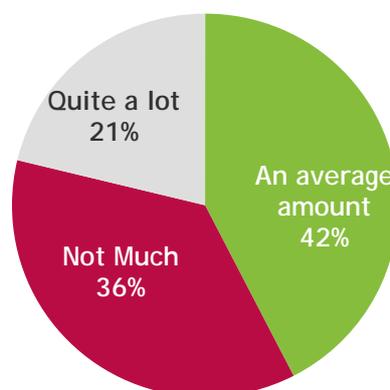
Respondents 298

Age range of children	% of respondents
8-12	64%
13-16	61%
17-19	22%
4-7	20%

The tri-Service results showed a slightly greater percentage of children in the 13-16 age range (64%), with the Royal Navy and RAF (75%) having a much higher percentage of 13-16 year old children (79%) compared to those in the 8-12 age range.

**Q5. How much did you know about state boarding schools before starting the CEA application process?**

Respondents 297



The Royal Navy had the greatest percentage of Service personnel knowing quite a lot about state boarding schools (37%), compared to the RAF (25%) and the Army

(21%). The RAF had the highest proportion who knew not much about them (42%), compared to the Army (36%) and Royal Navy (26%).

**Q6. Do your children attend a state boarding school?**

Respondents 298

Yes 17% (52) No 83% (246)

The RAF (22%) had slightly more children attending state boarding school, compared to the Royal Navy (21%) and the Army (17%).

**Q7. If yes, I chose the school because:**

Respondents 47

The top five reasons given were:

- It is a good fit for our child
- We couldn't afford an independent boarding school
- It has excellent sporting and pastoral facilities
- It is a good school academically
- I have friends whose children attend the school

"We couldn't afford an independent boarding school" was not a top five issue for Royal Navy or RAF respondents.

*"Wanted a balanced social mix of pupils and a comprehensive school atmosphere. Also wanted state school ideology but with added extra curricular activities."*

*"My husband left we could try and afford the fees"*

*"Younger child has a disability and felt the state system might serve him better as a main stream school"*

*"Excellent OFSTED reports, excellent pastoral care, highly recommended by friends who are in the Army."*

**Q8. Did you consider a state boarding school?**

Respondents 243

Yes 47% (115) No 53% (128)

A significantly higher number of Royal Navy (64%) and RAF (68%) respondents did consider a State Boarding School.

**Q9. Did any of the following prevent you from getting your child into a state boarding school?**

Respondents 46

Reasons	% of respondents
Personal circumstances	85%

Trying to transfer into Year 9 and told there were no places	9%
They told us the school was full	9%
The inability to transfer them to a day place once we leave the Armed Forces	9%
We missed the deadline for applications	7%
Failed the entrance exam	0%

The Royal Navy respondents stated that personal circumstances (50%) and being told the school was full (50%) were the only issues.

The RAF had a higher number of respondents stating that trying to transfer into Year 9 and told no places (14%), being told the school was full (14%) and the inability to transfer to a day-place once left the Armed Forces (14%), was an issue.

*“Not happy with the pastoral care arrangements for weekends; majority of children depart to homes leaving very few children with equally small care arrangements. None of the schools considered provided co-educational catholic education.”*

*“Do not cater for our age group: 8+ and not single sex which is how we want to educate our children”*

*“Inadequate provision for juniors and no extended family in geographic location”*

*“My oldest daughter is dyslexic and the provision for her at a private boarding school was far better”*

*“We felt strongly that the state boarding school we considered didn't have a boarding ethos and only a handful of boarders so our children would be in a very small minority at weekends. In effect it was a good grammar school with the ability for the children to sleep there- no Saturday lessons or programme of activities and games for the weekend. We chose boarding school to give our children a sense of belonging and camaraderie not to make them isolated.”*

*“Most did not do full boarding and that was absolutely key to our selection. Also geographically the state boarding schools were not well placed. Of the state boarding schools that we did look at, they were significantly unimpressive.”*

**Q10. I chose an independent boarding school because:**  
Respondents 233

The top five reasons given were:

- It is a good fit for our child
- It has excellent sporting and pastoral facilities
- It is a good school academically

- It is close to friends and family
- We wanted a school that went 8-18 years old

Being close to friends and family was not in the Royal Navy top five strongly agree reasons but "I do not believe state boarding school could offer my child the same opportunities as an independent boarding school," was included.

*"If my children have to be away from home for considerable periods because of my job, the least I can do is to pick the best team to nurture them in the manner I would wish. Had we found a suitable team of headmaster, housemaster and teachers in the state boarding system we would have picked them."*

*"It suited both of our children is co-educational and has a good proportion of boarders to day pupils."*

*"Three of our children have learning difficulties- the independent schools chosen for two of them offered much better support than any other school we looked at."*

*"Understanding of military way of life, non-judgemental on services as a profession. CCF offered."*

*"Location. Needed children within hour of family to help out with transport/medical trips etc etc as we were overseas, and no state school in the area."*

*"Why give my children state education when I can offer them private? If they had to go to state school, however good, I'd settle down in my own house even though I would much rather stay mobile."*

*"The key factors for me are the longer holidays, single sex education and better quality boarding and pastoral care. I am not sure that a state school could offer the level of pastoral care that I require for my children. My children have to board to enable mobility and as such I expect to have some choice and I want the best."*

*"Our children are not old enough to attend a state boarding school yet but have struggled with moving schools already hence the reason to send them aged 8. We will consider state and independent schools when they have to change schools in the future but the school will always need to be near family/friends who can help at weekends and holidays if we are posted abroad."*

*"I wanted a school with a higher boarding to day pupil ratio than the state boarding schools we looked at could offer. I did not want our children feeling like the odd ones out when the significant majority were day pupils."*

**Q11. Do you have any further comments about the Armed Forces and state boarding schools?**

Respondents 124

*"The whole reason for sending the children to boarding school was for continuity not only in education but with friends. We didn't want them mixing with a high number of military children that the state boarding schools had. We specifically wanted them to have non-military friends and see what their life was like."*

*"CEA is an integral part of why I stay in the Armed Forces, due to postings continual movement between schools for my children is not an option. State boarding schools do not offer the same value for money that Independent Schools do or indeed the extra-curricular activities and pastoral care that I have discovered."*

*"The decision to send children is not taken lightly and is forced upon families due to constant moving. In selecting a school, we had to be sure the pastoral care was excellent, the school had a proven track record of dealing with military families (especially if the father was on an operational tour) and it was small enough, especially in class size to be able to focus on my child. In addition, if my children were going to be sent to boarding school, I wanted them to be able to see (in later years) that they had benefitted. Sporting and academic opportunities were an important part and we did not find a state boarding school that offered that."*

*"My son attended both an independent and a state boarding school however we had to remove him from the state boarding school system because of the poor pastoral care."*

*"I was surprised that state boarding does not seem to have the same support for getting children to train or airports that we would expect from independent schools. This does make logistics easier when postings are not near the school."*

*"We are sent abroad and have to deal with collecting and dropping off children at school, organising exeats, orthodontist appointments etc; it is therefore very important that we have full freedom to choose a location which will work for us without leaving our child alone for weekends and half terms, and which will not lead to our paying fortunes for taxis and chaperones which are not reimbursed by the MOD."*

*"Quality of boarding accommodation at state boarding school dreadful. Independent sector offered single bedroom accommodation. Distinct impression state boarding did not embrace the military way of life. The pastoral care offered within the independent sector can be matched to the child's needs as there is far more choice of school."*

*"My daughter attends a state boarding school which is constantly in the top 5% of English State Non-Selective Schools. Personally I think that if a Service child attends a state boarding school due to frequent moves, we as a family should NOT have to top up the fees. It should be free as state schools are for day children. The school fees for my daughter's school are extremely high especially considering we only pay for the boarding element!!!!"*

*"I believe that whilst CEA is an allowance and we as parents pay upwards of 10%, we ultimately have the right to decide where we choose to send our children to"*

*board. The impact of boarding school on both the child and the family should never be underestimated - sending them away to school is a HUGE decision. It should always remain a personal decision that is based on what is best for the child, and whether state or independent is really only a concern for those who put money first."*

*"I think there is an opportunity to disseminate more information about state boarding schools. When I was at school, state boarding school had an association with troubled children who could not be managed at home as the majority intake. A PR campaign showing the features and benefits of state boarding schools today would be welcomed, I think."*

*"State boarding schools tend to have a higher proportion of children who have come through the care system/social services than Independent Boarding schools, and given some of the difficulties my children have encountered in the state sector at Primary level (where we had no choice as to which schools had places in appropriate year groups every time we moved) this is a situation we were keen to avoid."*

*"To be honest when we approached state boarding school there was the overall impression that some of the children were there because they could not be taught in the normal state system, these children were not of a military back ground. Speaking to some parents whose children attended gave the opinion that their children were sometimes hampered by extremely disruptive children who were sponsored by local authorities."*