

AFF Full Brief

Continuity of Education Allowance
Survey Results

March 2011



army families federation

AFF CEA Survey

“Interesting that I increasingly feel insulted by the Government, MOD, and the chain of command whilst I get nothing but positive support from the general public”

AFF conducted a Continuity of Education Allowance (CEA) Survey to allow families to express the importance of CEA to their children and to their commitment to the Armed Forces. The survey was available on our website and was open to families with children younger than eighteen years old. It ran from 4 February 2011 to 16 February 2011 and received 3,204 responses. The survey was produced in response to the ministerial review into CEA and principally their Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA) written survey and the huge amount of negative feedback we received from their respondents. The feedback was mainly from Service personnel, as opposed to their spouse. The level of response was unprecedented. By allowing families to comment, AFF has collected over 3,400 points of view.

Members of the other Services completed the survey. AFF can only represent the Army, but the impact of any change will be felt across all three Services.

Well done to AFF for taking this on in a constructive and meaningful way

I am most grateful to AFF for its engagement with the CEA survey and for providing a voice to those disenfranchised personnel currently serving on operations

Thank you for taking the time to listen to us all. Your support and help is hugely appreciated at a time when we are under constant pressure and strain as military families

RECOMMENDATION

AFF was told by soldiers and their families that if CEA were to be removed they could not continue to serve married accompanied. Removing the choice to serve married accompanied would be an alteration to the 'offer' that soldiers and their families signed up to. If soldiers cannot serve accompanied our findings demonstrate that they will leave the Army.

As well as the enormous response to the survey, AFF received 300 emails from Service personnel who reacted in fury to the original DASA survey. The main theme of the emails was the belief that their commitment during a period of extremely dangerous and high tempo operations would be repaid by the retention of CEA. Service personnel view any alterations to CEA in the wider context of pay freezes, redundancy, reduced promotion prospects and pension reductions. They are all viewed as an assault on the Military Covenant, but the threat to CEA has produced the most spectacular reaction. Some of the comments have been included in the appendix.

- CEA is judged as important by those not currently claiming it as it is for those currently doing so
- Families with SEN children expressed concern that neither survey addressed SEN issues or sought their specific views
- Soldiers and their families have planned their future and their finances around this and other allowances. The removal or radical alteration is regarded as a betrayal of their loyalty
- There is a real risk that soldiers who would have claimed CEA in its current guise will choose to leave the Army if CEA is altered or removed
- Overwhelmingly families felt that those abusing the system should be weeded out first. Fraud should not be tolerated. Families recognise that this allowance is for mobile families
- Families already contribute a significant amount towards school fees with the majority contributing over £1,000 per term, plus the cost of uniforms and other extras. Few families would be able to afford an increase in parental contribution

RECOMMENDATION

- Removing CEA at Key Stage 2 would encourage younger soldiers and officers to leave prematurely as they seek stability and alternative employment elsewhere
- Families were not questioned on the removal of CEA for Sixth Form. AFF understands that many civilian children move from school to Sixth Form colleges. However, those children would generally be moving with some of their friends within a familiar geographical area. Service children are likely to be further hindered by admittance deadlines being before assignment orders are released
- Families with dual serving parents are particularly concerned about the removal of this allowance and how it will affect their ability to serve
- The communication of the DASA survey and review into CEA has produced widespread discontent

Initial findings indicate an exodus of personnel to civilian careers. Without CEA many soldiers and families will not be prepared to endure the negative aspects of an Army career. Removal of the allowance would severely restrict the type of person who is prepared to serve in the Army - a dramatic cultural change which is neither welcomed nor wanted by personnel who have invested and risked their lives serving their country.

Whatever is decided by the Ministerial Review any change to this allowance must be introduced sensitively and all stakeholders must be well briefed before the announcement. AFF stresses that soldiers and their families have committed to the Forces and made lifestyle choices based on the belief that CEA, in its current guise, would be available. Any vast alteration or removal of all or elements of the allowance will be met with further derision. The DASA survey and the perceived threat to CEA resulted in the most explosive and largest number of comments AFF has received in its thirty year history.

AFF CEA Survey

Q1 Do you have children younger than eighteen that live with you? (please include any children at boarding school) If yes, you will be directed to more questions.

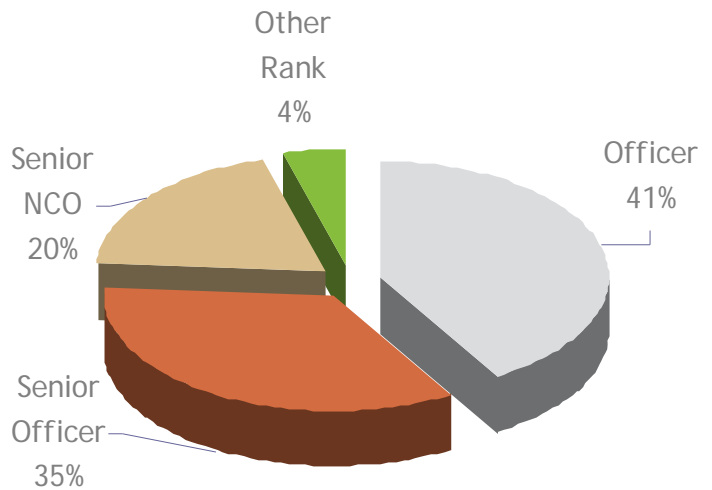
Yes	91%
No	9%

This question mirrored the DASA survey so we could report with some comparable data. 54% of respondents who had children younger than 18 living with them claimed CEA.

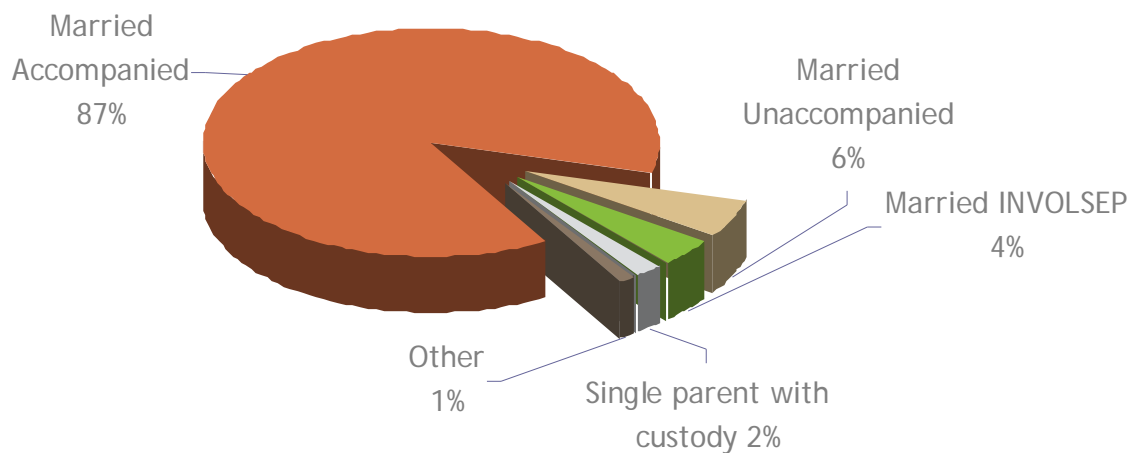
Personnel who have not yet had children also contacted us. They felt that they should have been given the opportunity to comment on CEA as they have a vested interest in the allowance and it will affect their decision on whether to stay in the Army.

Q2 Please select which category the serving soldier falls within:

AFF does not usually ask rank-related questions as our surveys are directed at families who bear no rank. However, on this occasion AFF felt that it was important to try and 'de-bunk' the myth that CEA was only used by Senior Officers and present the case that the removal of this highly important allowance would have resounding effects across all ranks. It is noteworthy that 30% of officers are Late Entry Officers - soldiers who have been commissioned having been 'through the ranks'.



Q3 For this posting are you:



AFF asked this question to determine whether the vast majority of respondents serve married accompanied. These respondents all have numerous examples about how many quarters they have lived in since marrying.

Only 21% of married unaccompanied were claiming CEA but 76% of INVOLSEP (Involuntary Separated) were in receipt of CEA. With the tightening of the rules on claiming CEA, AFF welcomed how few claimants were serving married unaccompanied or INVOLSEP. Further tightening of the rules and rigorous checks will further improve the situation.

Married for eighteen years and moved fourteen times

Twelve moves in twenty-one years (including Germany twice, Hong Kong and Canada)

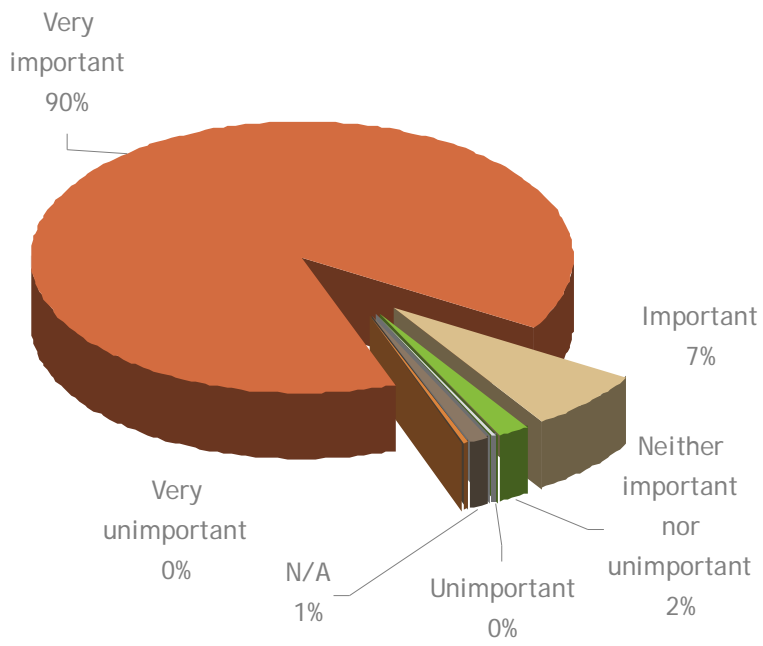
I moved into my fourteenth house before Christmas, having been married for eighteen years

Q4 How important to you and your family is it to have the choice to serve married accompanied?

Accompanied Service has been recognised by the soldier, the families and the Army to be an important factor in the Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS). AFF understands that the New Employment Model (NEM) will aim to reduce the mobility of soldiers and their families. It is anticipated that they would then be encouraged out of Service Families Accommodation (SFA) and into their own homes.

AFF approves of any plan that gives choice to Service personnel and their families regarding accommodation.

However, the overwhelming majority of our respondents who were Officers and SNCOs struggled to understand how the NEM could apply to them. They felt that they were being corralled into a life where SFA was withdrawn and they would have to serve as 'warrior monks' for the majority of their service or leave the Army in order to live with their spouse. Army families have made lifestyle choices based on the belief that CEA will be available for their children.



81% of those currently serving INVOLSEP and 89% of married unaccompanied believe that having the choice of serving accompanied is important.

We are already separated enough due to training and deployments. It is essential to sustain marriage to be married accompanied. I already feel like a single mother

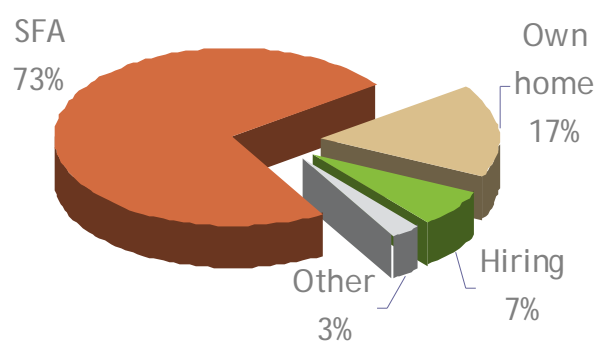
When we married and decided to have children, the decisions we made were based on what was on the table - accompanied service and CEA

Prolonged periods of 'weekending' are draining and certainly contributed to the breakdown of my first marriage. Being in the military does not mean that one wants to give up on having a family life

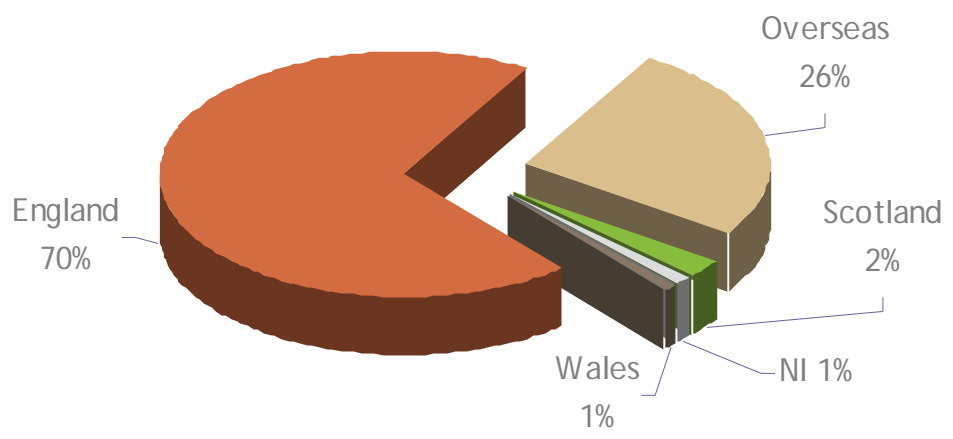
Q5 What sort of accommodation do you have?

Again, this question showed that overwhelmingly soldiers and their families are living in SFA.

46% of those serving INVOLSEP live in their own house. 79% of those claim CEA. Changes to the eligibility rules for those serving in London means that on their next posting those living in their own home and claiming CEA must be prepared to move on posting as those in SFA do. Those who ticked 'other' were usually serving overseas seconded with FCO or other similar Government departments.



Q6 Where is your current posting?



70% of respondents are currently posted in England. 59% of those claim CEA as do 43% of those living overseas. The responses to our survey make it clear that respondents have moved many times over the soldier’s career and have lived in a variety of countries. This means their children have been subjected to many different Local Education Authorities, syllabuses, and examination boards. There are substantial differences between the English, Scottish and Northern Irish education systems which add further disadvantage to a child’s education prospects.

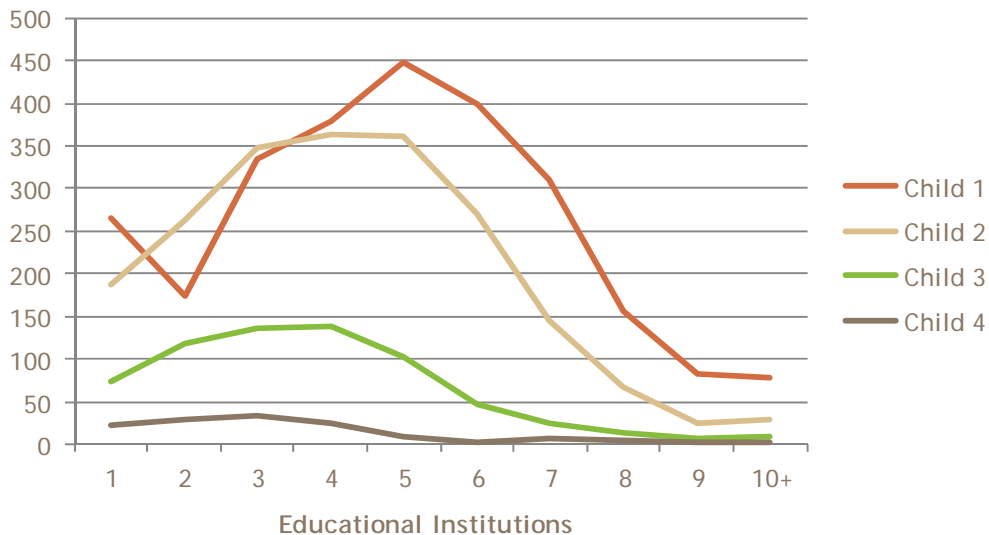
Q7 Are you or your spouse currently deployed, undertaking pre-deployment training or have returned within the last six months?

Yes	33.5%
No	66.5%

This question was asked to demonstrate how many of those serving on the frontline in Afghanistan are being affected by cuts.

70.5% of those respondents answering ‘yes’ had been unable to complete the DASA survey due to either not hearing about it or being unable to access it. Our comments mainly came from spouses desperately upset that they were missing out on an opportunity to have their say.

Q8 Please detail how many educational institutions each of your children have attended including nursery, pre-school etc?



Many of our respondents commented that they were recording a low number of educational institutions because they had already opted to send their children to boarding school and therefore had reduced the mobility of their children. Under the comment box they ‘totted’ up how many institutions their children would have attended if they had not moved them to a boarding school.

Those responding and claiming CEA recorded an average of six different institutions and an average age of eleven for starting boarding school for their first child. While second children started a lot earlier they were still recording an average attendance of five or more institutions by the age of eight.

Impact of mobility on education

Another posting equals another new school. Service children can attend upwards of five different schools up to the age of sixteen, and past research has suggested that each move can put a child back six months. Children also have to cope with leaving friends behind and making new ones with each move.

Service children can move between England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, SCE schools and even local schools overseas. Each area has its own system, meaning adjusting to changes in curriculum, ethos and sometimes even year group.

It is not always easy for parents to choose a school for their child, or to get their child into the school of their choice if it is popular and oversubscribed. Admissions worries and appeals are an ongoing part of Service life.

Service children are proportionally more likely to have Special Educational Needs and to require extra help in school. This is often the result of 'gaps' in their learning caused by moving schools. It is important that the time and resources spent waiting for and undergoing assessments in one school are carried over effectively when the child moves.

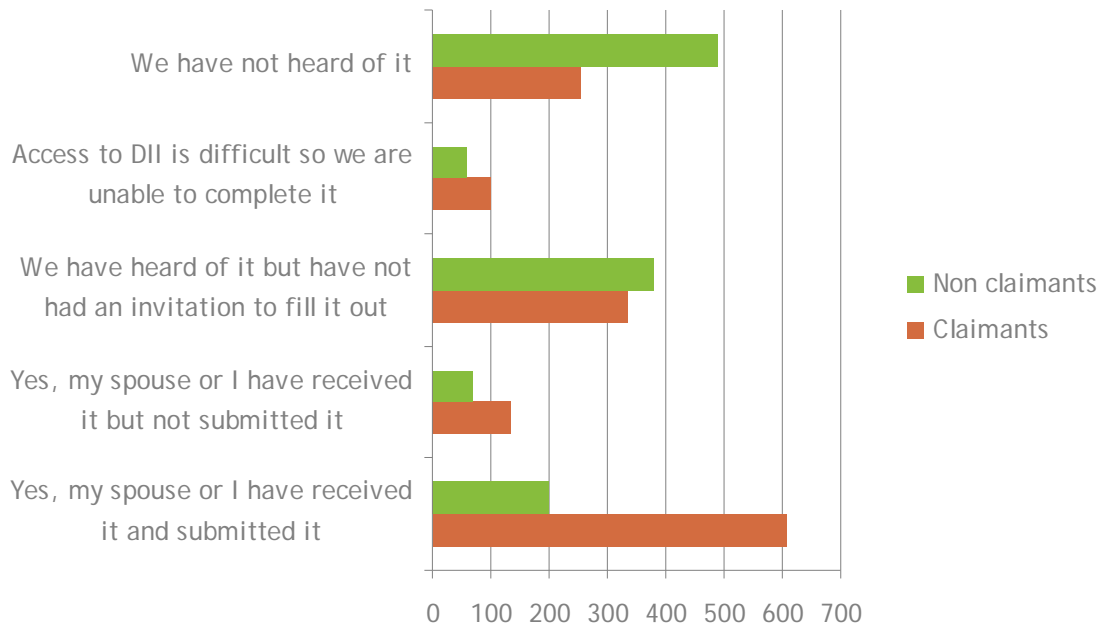
As the son of a soldier who travels around the world taking his family with him, the upheaval and disturbance of education at critical times had the profound effect of me leaving school with no GCSEs. I take my daughter's education very seriously and could not put her through the same stress and confidence knocks that I took, having to catch up with new syllabuses every two to three years. I would leave the Army rather than subject her to that

We never wanted to send our children to boarding school. It was only when our eldest at ten asked to go because "I don't want to keep changing schools anymore", as he was about to enter his sixth for two terms before having to move to a seventh. It infuriates me when detractors of CEA see it as an elitist allowance, nothing could be further from the truth

By age ten my daughter had attended five different schools and two pre-schools. This was very disruptive and she had dyslexia which was unrecognised until she went to boarding school. Previous schools had put it down to gaps in moving

Eight schools at the age of only thirteen!

Q9 Were you asked to complete the DASA CEA Survey?



44% of Other Ranks had not heard of the DASA survey and 28% of those claim CEA
 39% of SNCO had not heard of the DASA survey and 26% of those claim CEA
 31% of Senior Officers and Officers had not heard of the DASA survey and 18% claim CEA

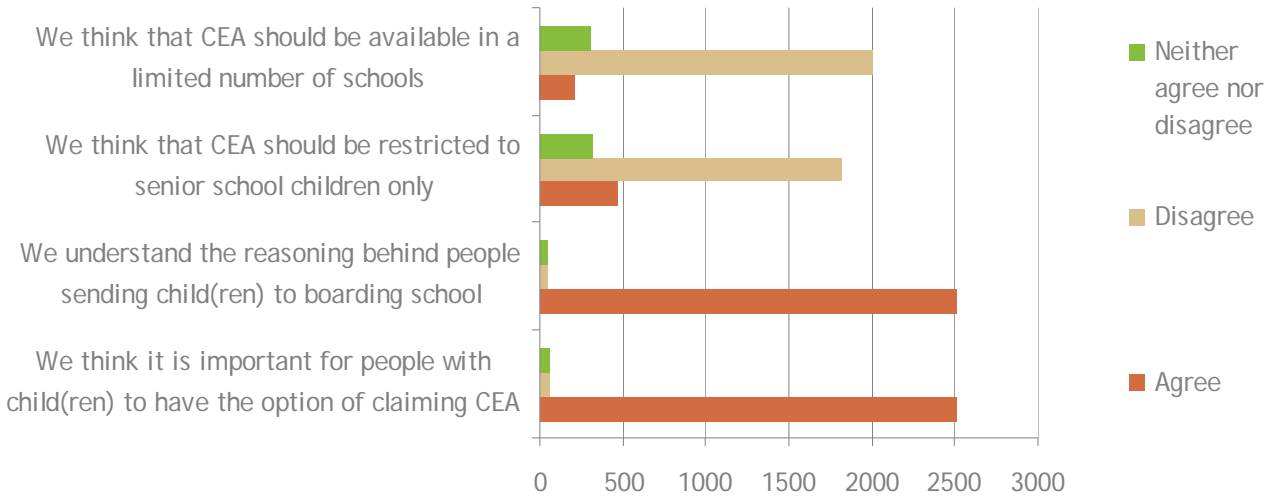
These figures demonstrate that Personnel without access to DII due to their role were less likely to have accessed the survey.

Of those non claimants who had not heard of the DASA survey, 57.5% of those would like the opportunity to claim CEA in the future.

AFF did not receive any results for 'We have heard of it but have not had an invitation to fill it out' or 'Access to DII is difficult so we are unable to complete the survey' after 14 February 2011, which we believe coincides with AFF advertising it on its website as well as DASA using other means to enable serving personnel to access the survey. Although we know of numerous personnel who claim CEA but were not provided with the login information to access the DASA survey.

AFF received a large volume of comments from Serving personnel based overseas who were unable to access the DII survey. AFF has previously stated that we believe the DASA survey to have been poorly constructed, and comments to DASA and AFF from Service personnel reiterate that point. AFF also believes that the geographical restrictions to the survey demonstrate the lack of thought put into the construction and delivery of the DASA survey.

Q10 Please select as appropriate, answers to the following statements:



The first two questions attracted many remarks. Because Service personnel are expected to financially contribute there is an expectation that this should allow them the right to choose where to spend their money.

Limiting number of schools

The proposal to reduce the amount of schools currently approved to take Service children from 450 to a number such as 50 (figure mentioned by head of CEA Review Team) is an unpopular one for many reasons. While AFF accepts this may achieve greater efficiency in administering the allowance and offers the opportunity to negotiate overall larger discounts, the reduction of the choice of schools impacts on a parent’s ability to choose the right school for their children. Respondents found this option to be almost unpalatable. AFF understands that civilian families are faced with limited choices with regard to schooling however, when a child is expected to board at school, the family need to feel reassured that their child will be happy. Any change to the selection of schools will have to be thoroughly tested, without using Service children as guinea pigs. A ‘half baked’ scheme which does not deliver the type of pastoral care that families expect for their children, will result in personnel leaving the Army to seek stability and the schooling of their choice.

I disagree that CEA should only be available in a limited number of schools. When I was choosing a suitable school for my son, the first criteria we looked at was the location. It was vital that the school was located within a reasonable distance from family so they could visit him or be able to look after him at their home in the event of illness

If CEA is limited to certain schools these may not be geographically suitable to certain people as being near a support network in the UK when away from their own family is a fundamental consideration for support and pastoral care

By limiting choice of school, you are likely to 'ghettoise' a small number of Service family friendly schools who may end up tailoring their education to a less rounded, more military-centric sort that may not be in keeping with broader families' values

Restrict school age to senior school only

The average age for the first born child to attend boarding school was eleven. By the time their second or third child etc reached eight, parents had been able to see the positive effects of continuity with their first born and were therefore much keener to mitigate mobility for their other children at a much younger age. Soldiers and officers are still likely to move very frequently and across a wide geographical area. Restricting CEA to post eleven would enforce frequent school moves for their children. We know that families like to serve accompanied. Changes to the age at which children are eligible for CEA could result in more soldiers (including officers) leaving at an earlier point to seek an alternative career and to provide a stable education for their children.

The disruption to children’s education and social development from multiple school moves is just as problematic at a younger age as it is during secondary education

With a highly disrupted primary education, Forces children are at a serious disadvantage when it comes to competing for places at good boarding schools at 11+

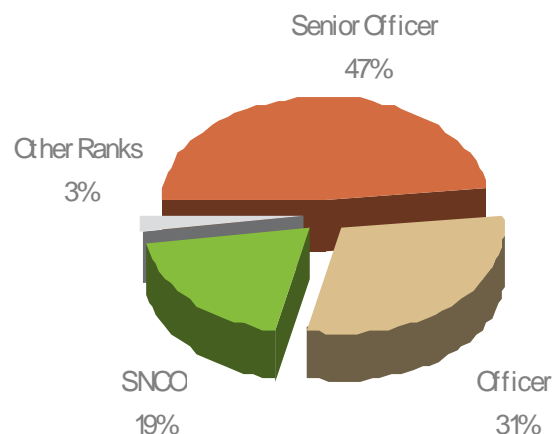
Our eight year old has just started boarding - she has had four schools already! If you restrict it means at least three more schools before she can attempt to have continuity

Q11 Do you claim CEA?

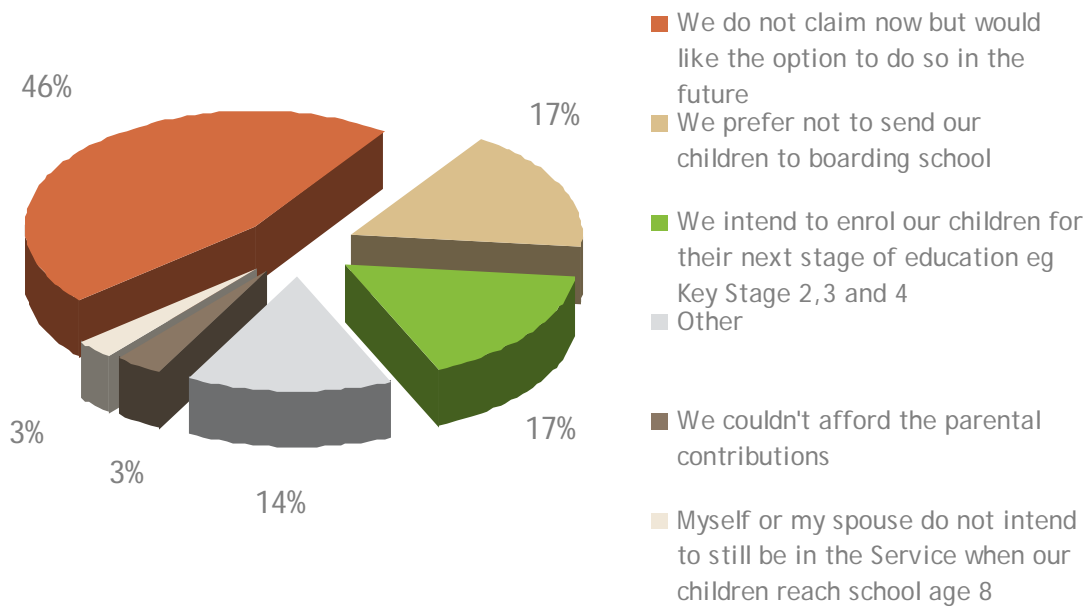
Yes	54%
No	46%

We were pleased that non-recipients also completed the survey as we feel that it provides a more balanced debate on the issue.

An additional factor to consider is that 30% of those in the category ‘officer’ are Late Entry Officers. Rather than being class biased, CEA offers an amazing social mobility tool, recognised and used by NCOs and is an effective retention tool for that reason.



Q12 We are not claiming CEA for the following reason: (please select one)



62% of respondents currently not claiming CEA are either intending to enrol their child at their next stage of education or would like the option to do so.

Of the 'other' (169) respondents many had children not currently at school age and had not made a firm decision however, many commented that they would still want the option to claim in the future.

We don't claim CEA because our children are too young to go to prep school but we will leave the Army if the option to do so is removed at a later stage

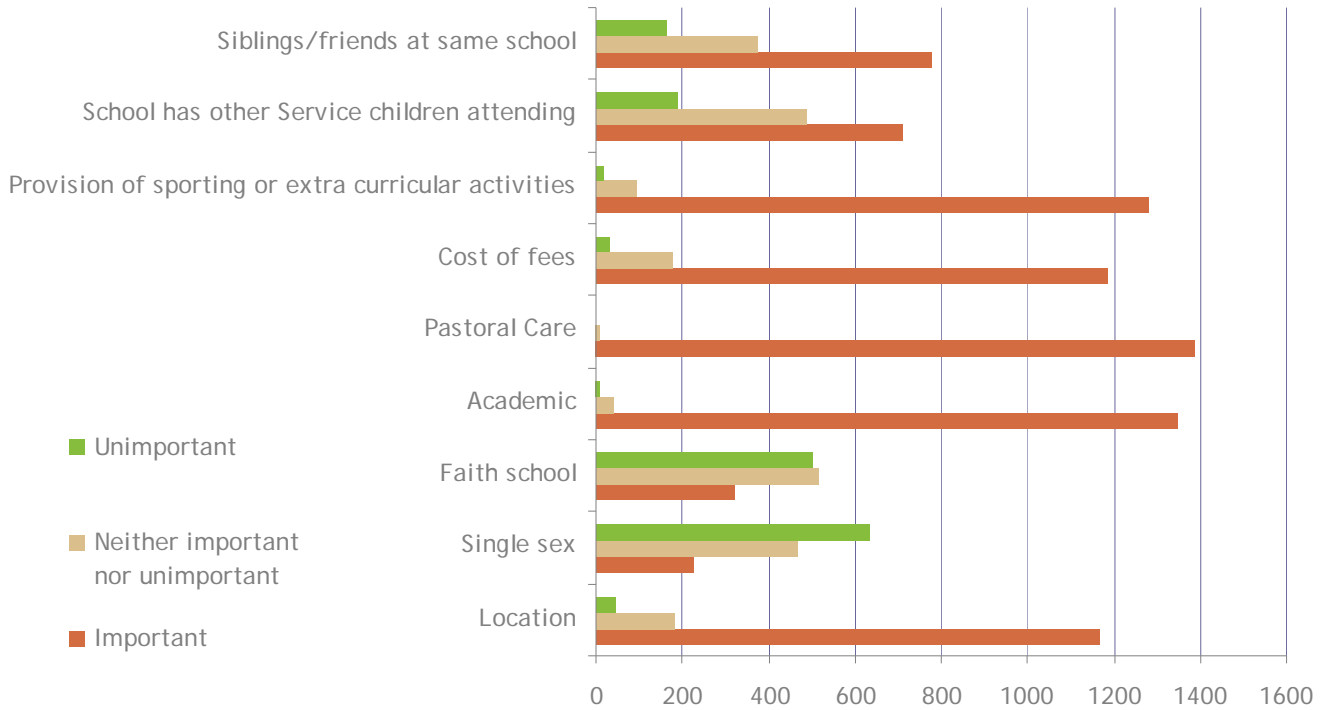
I don't think CEA is necessary. One of my children has gone through state education and on to University, the other is studying for A levels. My family has remained stable for the sake of their education despite me serving away from home for a significant amount of my career. I am currently serving in my sixth unaccompanied posting in less than four years

We have made very major life choices in the expectation of CEA. We intend to claim in eighteen months time, when our children are old enough

We do not currently claim as our kids are four and two years old at present. We would like the option to do so in the future though

At this point of the survey only existing claimants could answer the questions.

Q13 What was important to you when choosing a school?



The right to choose the location of a school so that children had family or friends living close by was very important to respondents. Full boarding was also regarded as a high priority as were the cost of fees and pastoral care.

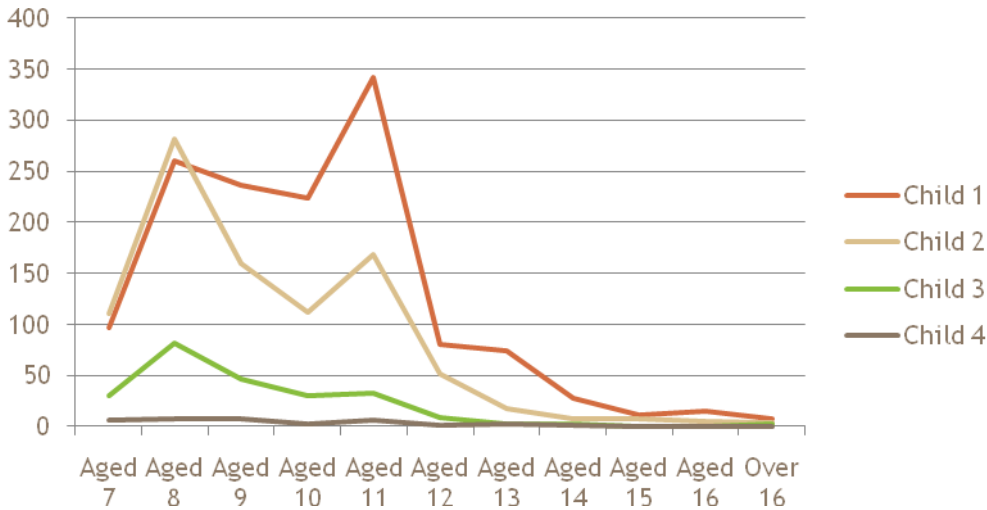
The school is very understanding towards Service children but I would not want to send my children to a school with a large proportion of Service children - variety is important

Full boarding with weekends (less exeat) expected to be spent in school is also extremely important to avoid military children being left almost alone at non-exeat weekends

Choosing the right school is so difficult - and that is without any restrictions. Frankly, we still pay an awful lot over and above CEA as it doesn't really come that close to matching the ever-increasing fees within the private sector. The fact I cannot choose where to serve or which state school my children 'could' attend as we continue to move house at least every two years is my main reason for claiming

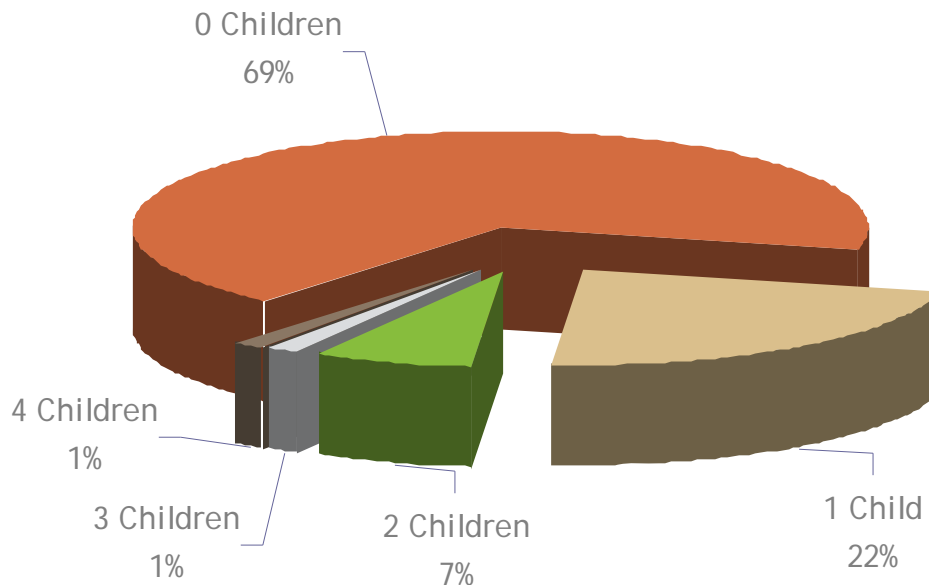
Families have very personal reasons for choosing a school which they believe is right for their child. Families have spent considerable time and money selecting a school which matches their criteria and will be suspicious of any new scheme. Choosing a boarding school, and handing them the parental responsibility for their children is a deeply personal decision. Families would need enormous reassurance that quality of pastoral care is not compromised. A poorly constructed scheme which does not deliver will result in an exodus of Service personnel.

Q14 What age were your children when you started claiming CEA for them?



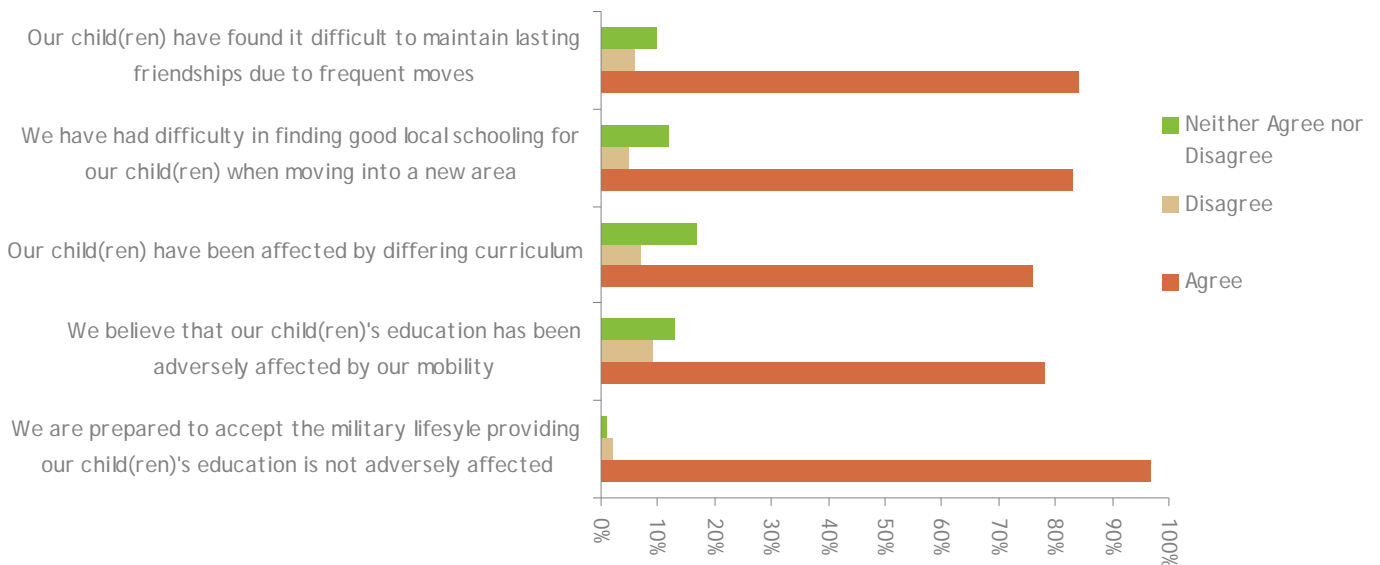
Parents can see how the results of a stable education affect their eldest child and therefore are much keener to give their younger children that stability.

Q15 Do you have additional children currently too young for CEA but you are expecting to send to boarding school when they qualify?



One of the possibilities discussed with the Head of the CEA Review Team was a 'grandfather rights' option. AFF wanted to find out how that would affect children of parents claiming CEA for siblings but too young themselves to attend boarding school. 32% of those claiming CEA would be affected by this option putting them in a difficult position - having to be mobile for the child in boarding school and having to try and mitigate mobility for the child that is not.

Q16 Please select as appropriate answers to the following statements:



97.5% of respondents agreed “We are prepared to accept the military lifestyle (frequent moves, standard of housing, long periods of separation etc) providing our child(ren)'s education is not adversely affected.” An overwhelming sign to the MOD that CEA is where soldiers and families draw the line. One father even commented that if CEA was to be removed it would be ‘selfish’ of him to continue in the Army.

People who disagreed were generally doing so because children were in the CEA system and therefore not being affected by the above issues.

My daughter has studied the Victorians three times, but knows nothing about the Egyptians or the Romans. Children lose six months when they move schools, and clearly, this is not sustainable when they change schools almost annually!

I found the support from the previous LEA very anti-military families when moving to the area. They were also unwilling to test my son for dyslexia as we were ‘passing through’

Due to postings in [UK] Scotland and Northern Ireland we have adversely affected our children’s education as they are three totally different systems where even the entry dates vary. A child born in August in England will go in to a particular school year, but would be in the year below in NI or Scotland. Therefore our daughter went down a school year, then back up, then down again. She is now in boarding school and is back up a year again

Q17 Do you believe that boarding school helps to shield your children from the detrimental effects of deployment and frequent moves?

Yes	96%
No	2%
Don't know	2%

I was seriously wounded in Afghanistan while my daughters were boarding and the pastoral support provided by the school and the close friendships they had established there has helped them deal with the whole situation. It also took a huge weight of worry from my wife, who knew the girls were being well looked after

Q18 Would you be prepared to consider a rank based contribution system for CEA?

Yes	34%
No	48%
Don't know	18%

This question attracted some criticism as respondents were reluctant to comment without an idea of how much the contribution would be.

Other Ranks and SNCOs (50% and 46%) were the most enthusiastic about this proposal, presuming that their contribution would not go up significantly. 30% of Senior Officers and Officers were less supportive deducing that they would be the ones who would bear the brunt of increased contributions.

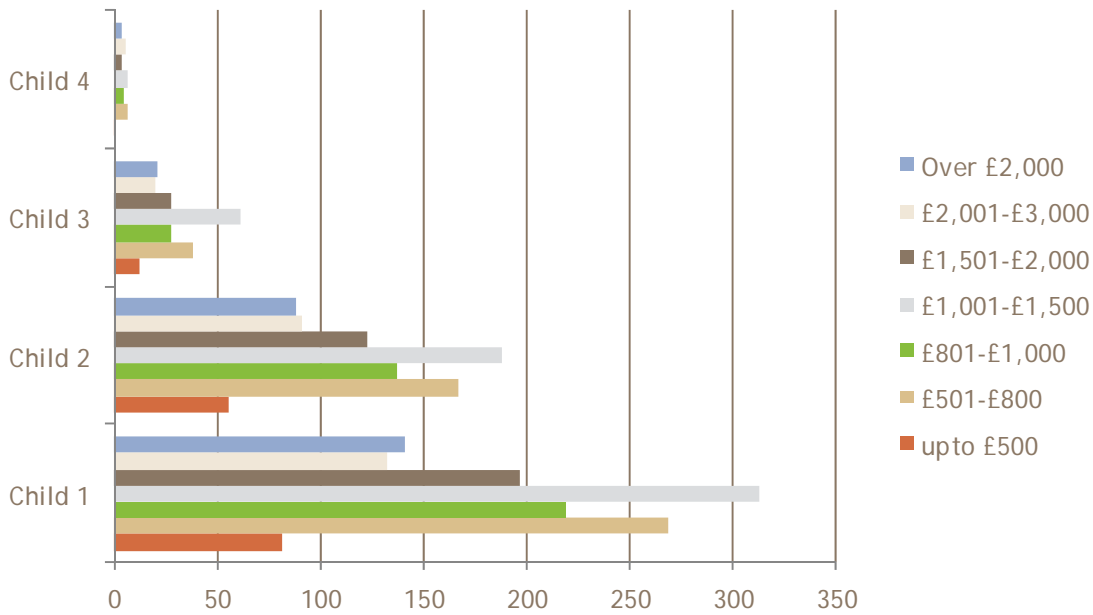
Respondents also commented that it would also depend on the size of the family. A soldier might be priced out of the market if he/she had more than two children.

CEA should be available to every rank that require it. I would be prepared to contribute a slightly greater proportion as rank and financial earning power increases

MOD is constantly eliminating rank based differences in allowances (eg Disturbance). They can't have it both ways

It would be a disincentive to promotion and it cannot be in the Army's interests to create a situation where someone has to balance the affordability of their children's education against career progression. It would be extraordinarily divisive

Q19 How much per term per child is your personal contribution (including minimum payment of 10%) to your school fees after CEA?



Families are already contributing a significant amount from their own income. This does not include the costs of school uniform and additional costs. We know that families already make significant sacrifices to afford the 'top-up' of their children's fees.

This does not include the additional travel for half-terms not included in SCVs (School Children's Visits) at up to £4000 a year! (£450 per flight to Middle East).

[Our contribution] will increase markedly from the age of thirteen

I have based the choice of school on several factors but especially on what I can afford at a stretch. We go without notable things because of what I have decided I would pay towards my children's' education. I believe this to be a common course of action amongst personnel claiming the allowance

Q20 If you were asked to pay more than your current personal contribution would you still be able to afford to keep your children at their current boarding school?

Yes	22%
No	53%
Don't know	25%

53% of respondents would have to remove their children from their current boarding school if their contributions were increased - this was reflected in all the responses. The Boarding School Association (BSA) reported in The Times Education Supplement that this "could have considerable repercussions for schools".

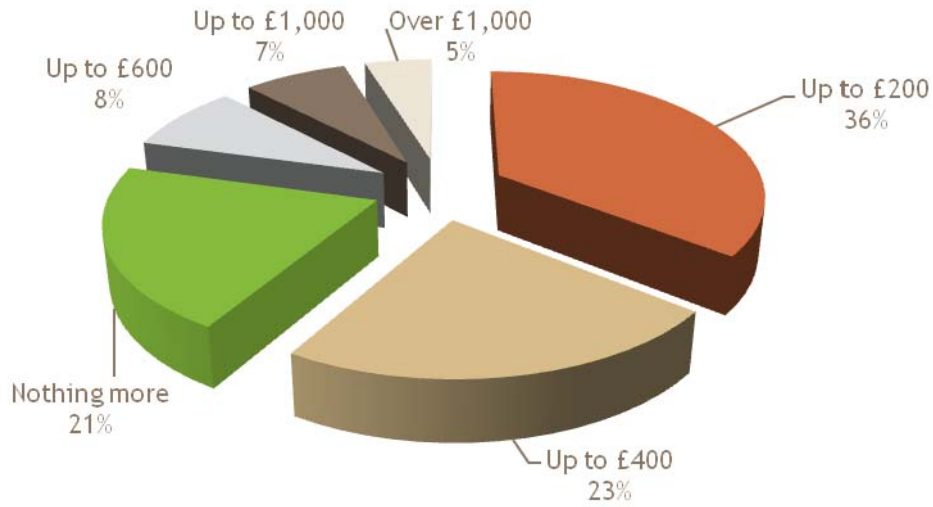
Those who said 'yes' often qualified it with only having one child left in the system or only a few years left to go so would take the hit on their savings.

We have been paying a contribution to school fees for twelve years which has prevented us from affording a mortgage - especially as constant moving has made it difficult to maintain two incomes on a regular basis

It would depend on how much. With pay freezes, allowance cuts and a reduction in standard of living, this would be another nail in the career coffin

As a lower ranked family currently claiming CEA we already go without seeing family, having holidays/days out as a family due to lack of funds. All our money currently goes on fuel, travelling the length and breadth of this country for exeat weekends and other school holidays

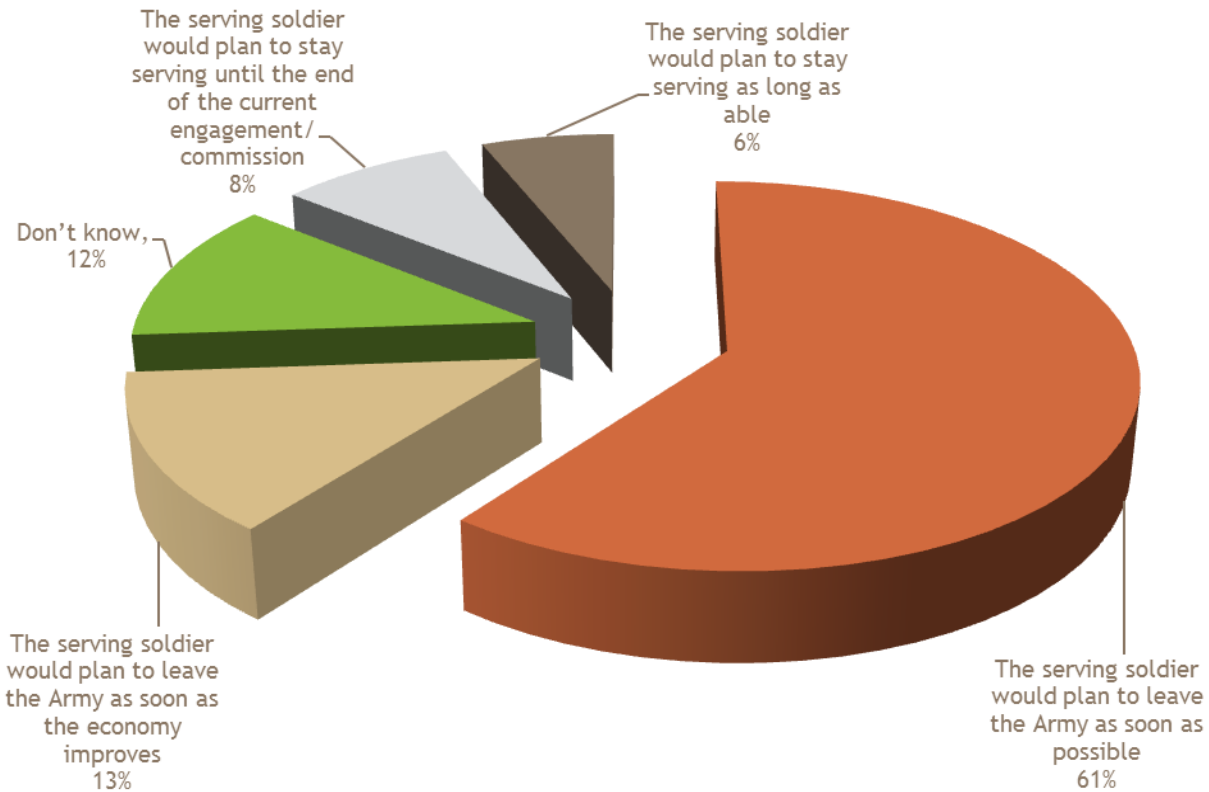
Q21 The DASA Survey, asked how much more would you be willing to contribute per child per term in order to maintain existing CEA entitlement. On top of your current personal contribution how much more would you be prepared to pay extra per child per term, to prevent the allowance being axed?



The DASA survey asked if the soldier would be willing to contribute £1,000 per term per child in order to retain CEA. Our survey revealed that only 5% of respondents would be willing to do so. Based on the answers in questions 19 and 20 it would appear they would be unwilling to pay more simply because they could not afford to.

Higher contributions would prevent the lower paid from using this allowance which would in effect make it the Senior officer's allowance it is so often accused of being by misinformed MPs. It would also significantly affect those with more than one child.

Q22 If CEA were no longer available how would this affect your plans for the future?



Only 6% of Senior Officers, 9% of Officers and 16% of SNCOs would plan to stay serving as long as possible. 27% of SNCOs would plan to stay to the end of their current engagement/ commission which could have an effect on the take-up and quality of applicants for Late Entry Commissions.

74% of Senior Officers, 60% of Officers, 42% of SNCOs and 39% of Other Ranks would plan to leave the Army as soon as possible or as soon as the economy improves if this allowance is cut.

The last point is paramount. I feel I have failed as a father by pursuing my own career ambition at the expense of their education. CEA removed some, not all, of the guilt

One final thought - it is worth noting how many NCOs make use of CEA, and how many of their children, having benefitted from it, then join the Armed Forces as officers. A prime example of social mobility, don't you think?

The economy is already improving and I am comfortable that I have excellent employment options beyond the Services. I enjoy my work but will only continue to serve if I can do so without increased detriment to my family. We have made a personal calculation (pros/ cons) but the Service is now tinkering with that calculation. The single biggest issue that would cause me to leave would be a significant change to the CEA rules

Appendices

We were sent a vast number of emails from Service Personnel, who were deeply angered by the DASA survey. We include some here to demonstrate the strength of feeling felt by our Service Personnel.

Quote from an Army Major

I have just filled in the survey on CEA about which I am appalled: not because it isn't right that DASA ask the questions, but because the survey has been constructed in such a one sided fashion, with no attempt to understand the education situation in the round. I have enclosed my response to them for your amusement / info - please feel free to use my views (anonymously) - but I shall be briefing any visitor to my unit on how appalling this is. Having sat through a schools appeal panel during which one of the members asked us "but didn't you expect to move around being in the Army" as we pointed out how difficult this was and asking the LEA for their help, the government's messages of the 'Military Covenant' still has some way to go. The Army aspires to give six months notice of a posting. Working back from the start of a school year, this means that you should hear in very early March what your next job is. London school applications closed on 25 Jan this year, meaning that you would have to know what area you were being posted to and where you were living to apply in time. By the time this happens, the schools you are prepared to send your children to are full, so not only are you penalised by not getting a fair crack at the whip because your children will have to move so often, but also that the only mitigating measure (a good school) is not available - I was offered two schools in special measures!! The infant class size rule just increases the burden as it reduces LEA flexibility. As a XXXXXX I will be expected to move house during my tour - once to start, once halfway through and once at the end - each time out of synch with school application dates... I wonder why as a XXXXXX I decided to go unaccompanied - the pain of this, plus being away most of the next year just wasn't worth it.

My view: our MILITARY senior leadership are letting us down: they have benefitted from a system which they are now seemingly prepared to see watered down in financial terms for those following on behind them: pulling the ladder up behind them is about the most generous description I can think of at the moment.

Quote from an Army Major

When I married it was accepted that my wife's career was over as we both agreed accompanied service was the only real option, you do not get married to live apart. My wife had to start a new career that better suited following the drum. Over the years I have seen the MOD voice its support to accompanied service but its actions have been to the contrary instead making it more attractive to settle your family and live apart. This has only fuelled my cynicism.

With the arrival of children, I was determined that they should not endure the effects of accompanied service and as my eldest daughter entered her fourth Primary School we decided she must have stability as she was suffering both socially and educationally. The choice of school was driven by a number of factors, but high on the list was geographical location and in particular close proximity to family who now fill the parenting gap. All three of my daughters are now at the same school and, with the support of both family and the school, are thriving. This allows me to continue to serve where ever I am required.

It is interesting to hear that some view CEA as an inducement or a perk of service, this surprises me. I view CEA as a compromise to balance the negative effects of military service on family life. I detest the fact my children do not live at home and that I am reliant upon others for their upbringing. If I had a choice we would live together as a family in a fixed location but this is not going to happen so CEA makes this compromise possible. Any attempts to reduce the CEA package, be it financial support or parental choice, would make me question the Army's commitment to me and my continued service. Any drastic changes, or worst still a withdrawal of CEA, would see my resignation as my children's education is too important to be played with by cost cutting zealots.

Unfortunately the cynic in me wonders if this is an assisted redundancy ploy by the MOD as I sit in the demographic under the spotlight for thinning out. An exodus of majors would certainly help the Army balance the books.

Quote from 'an AFF admirer'

The CEA v SFA question is akin to being asked whether one might volunteer for water-boarding in preference to having one's toe nails removed. The outcome of the CEA v SFA question is very obvious when the vast majority of servicemen rely on SFA and a far smaller number rely on CEA. Clearly, the results of the DASA CEA survey will have to be treated with extreme caution.

The growing gap between government rhetoric and reality with regards to the Military Covenant is an increasing concern; service morale and their 'faith in the system' is being sorely tested at a time when the armed forces have been, and are, working extremely hard, often in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Pay freezes and reduced personal allowances is one thing, but I judge that a perception that our children are being targeted (via possible reduced CEA entitlement) is a concern of much greater magnitude.

I have discussed this issue with senior Capts and junior Maj's and the message has been consistent - if they do not have confidence that they can rely on CEA being available to provide their children with a stable education then they will leave the services in order to provide the stability required.

Facts and Figures - in case these statistics help you in any way.

- My service - more than 28 years
- Married accompanied, 2 children
- Posted abroad, 2 children at boarding school in UK - in receipt of CEA. We could not pay the fees without CEA support.
- Married for 18 years
- Lived in 13 houses in 18 years
- Child 1 has been to 7 different educational establishments (incl. pre-school)
- Child 2 has been to 6 different educational establishments (incl. pre-school)
- During the last 8 years only 2 have been based in the UK - the children have lived in 4 different countries in 8 years.

This poignant letter was written by a child desperate to go to boarding school.

Tuesday 23rd November 2010

Dear diary,

Boring! I'm moving house! Honestly my parents are mad. Why? I've got to go back to Canada, back to Saint Agnes school. I wonder if Miss Ganfusscaccio will still be there? She was my teacher in Year or Grade 1. I wonder if Tyler, Eric and my other old friends are still there. My mum made me pack up. Seriously. I am still shell-shocked! Why do we have to? I lay in bed and I just can't stop crying. I really going to miss my friends. I have only been here 9 months and I'm moving away again. I want to ~~run~~ run away to never stop, and never look back. I hate them. Why? Just because my dad is in the army doesn't mean I have to get moved ~~ex~~ around every year and half. This time it's only nine months you know, and then you move again.

I'm looking out the window at my friends kicking a ball about. How long to be out there instead of being stuck in this ~~****~~ room! My anger is welling up inside me. Why! I ^{should} ~~am~~ going to run away. But I am probably too much of a coward. I wouldn't get cool birthday presents again. So I don't think I'm going to ~~run~~ ^{move} away. I just hope year seven will come fast so I can go to boarding school and stay put!

Well I got to go mum wants me! Whhh!
Well, catch ya later!
Adam :)



representing Army families everywhere

