

Creative Forces 2023/24

Evaluation report

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Introduction

This report presents the findings for the evaluation of the Creative Forces events designed in collaboration with the Service Children's Progression Alliance (SCiP) and delivered by LiNCHigher in the academic year 2023/24.

The Creative Forces events as a whole were evaluated in 2018/19 by Dr Michael Hall¹. Please refer to the [SCiP Alliance Creative Forces Evaluation Report 2019](#) for full context of the Creative Forces programme and further background information.

The Office for Students has identified Children from Military families (Service children) as a group underrepresented in higher education and has tasked the Uni Connect with the following aims:

1. Contribute to reducing the gap in higher education participation between the most and least represented groups.
2. Equip young and adult learners from underrepresented groups to make an informed choice about their options in relation to the full range of routes into and through higher education and to minimise the barriers they may face when choosing the option that will unlock their potential, including barriers relating to academic attainment.

¹ [Creative-Forces-Evaluation-Report-2019-FINAL.pdf](#)

3. Support a strategic local infrastructure of universities, colleges and other partners that can cut through competitive barriers, offer an efficient and low-burden route for schools and colleges to engage with higher education outreach, enable schools to engage with attainment raising activity, and address outreach 'cold spots' for underrepresented groups.
4. Contribute to a stronger evidence base around 'what works' in higher education outreach and strengthen evaluation practice across the sector.

The Creative Forces events in this report were predominantly designed to support progress towards these aims.

This evaluation aims to assess the impact that attending a Creative Forces event had on a pupil with regards to their understanding, knowledge and confidence surrounding higher education through survey responses gathered from pupils at the start and end of each event. This evaluation has been compiled internally by the LiNCHigher team.

Three Creative Forces events were held across the academic year on two university campuses on the following dates:

01/03/2024 – Bishop Grosseteste University

26/03/2024 – University of Lincoln

06/07/2024 – Bishop Grosseteste University

Events hosted in March 2024 were open to any pupil at a Lincolnshire secondary school who was identified as a Service child, whereas the July event was a bespoke event for one secondary school with a large number of Service children on role.

Evaluation Method

The evaluation consisted of:

- Impact data gathered from students pre and post event via paper surveys
- Impact data gathered from teachers following the event via paper surveys

In order to measure the impact of the event, students were asked to rate their level of agreement on a five point scale indicating level of agreement with the following questions on both the pre and post surveys:

- I can imagine myself as a university student when I am older
- I am aware of the benefits of university/higher education
- I feel confident talking to an adult at my school about what jobs I can do when I am older
- I have what it takes to succeed in the job or course I am aiming for in future
- I know the steps I need to take in order to achieve my end goal

Additionally, students were asked the following questions:

Pre event survey:

- Indicate school year group
- How many schools have you attended in the past 2 years?
- Which branch(es) of the military is your family member(s) serving with/or has previously served with?
- Someone in my family has been to university
- The thing I am most looking forward to about the university visit is...

Post event survey:

- My favourite part of the university visit today was...
- I have had a chance to talk about my experiences of being a Service child today through conversation or badge making (This question was rated on a scale of 1 to 5)
- You can make the activities better by...

Some pupils completed only one survey, or did not complete the comparison questions on both surveys. These surveys have not been included in the results.

Results

The data here represents a total of 109 participants across all three Creative Forces events.

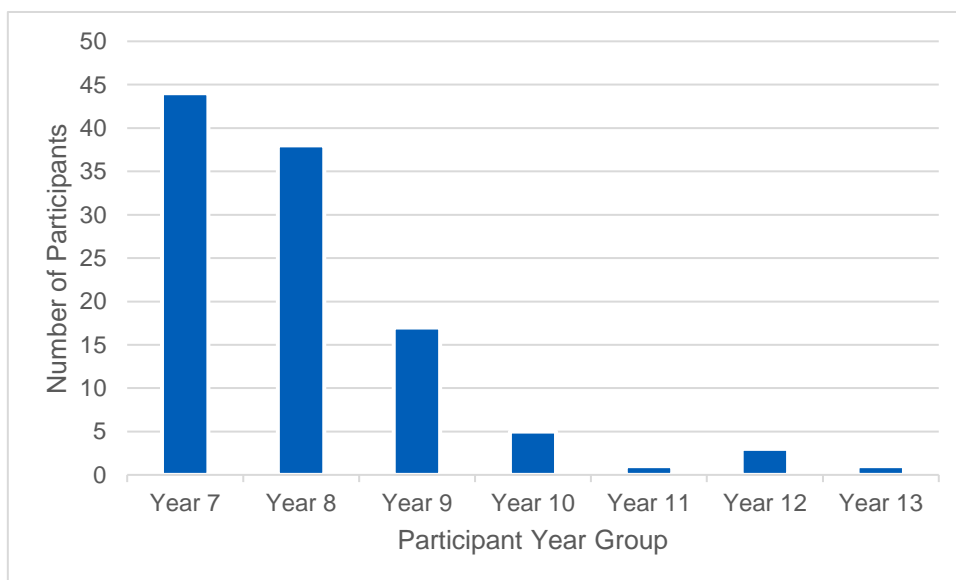


Figure 1: Academic year of participants

We can see that the majority of students attending the Creative Forces events are from years 7 – 9. Based on anecdotal evidence supplied by teachers before and during these events, this is likely to be due to student availability with exam schedules.

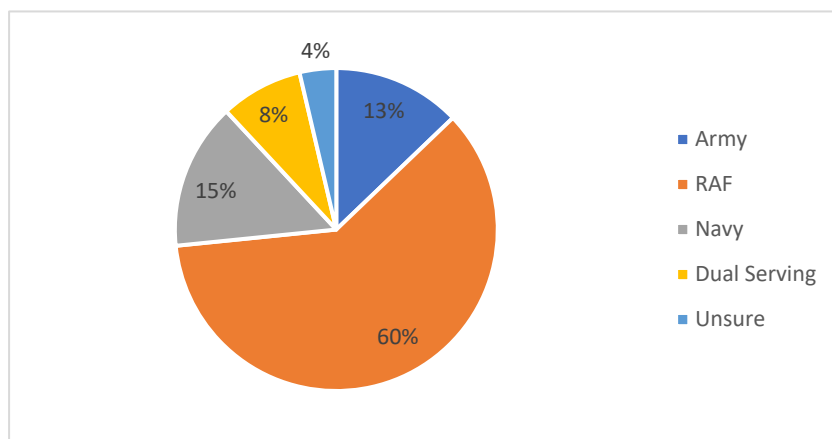


Figure 2: Participants by parental branch of service

The majority of participants (60%) indicated that they had at least one family member serving in the RAF. This correlates with the expected demographic based on the military presence within Lincolnshire.

The following radar chart indicates the average responses to the five comparable questions pre and post event. Direct comparisons of each question can be found in the appendices.

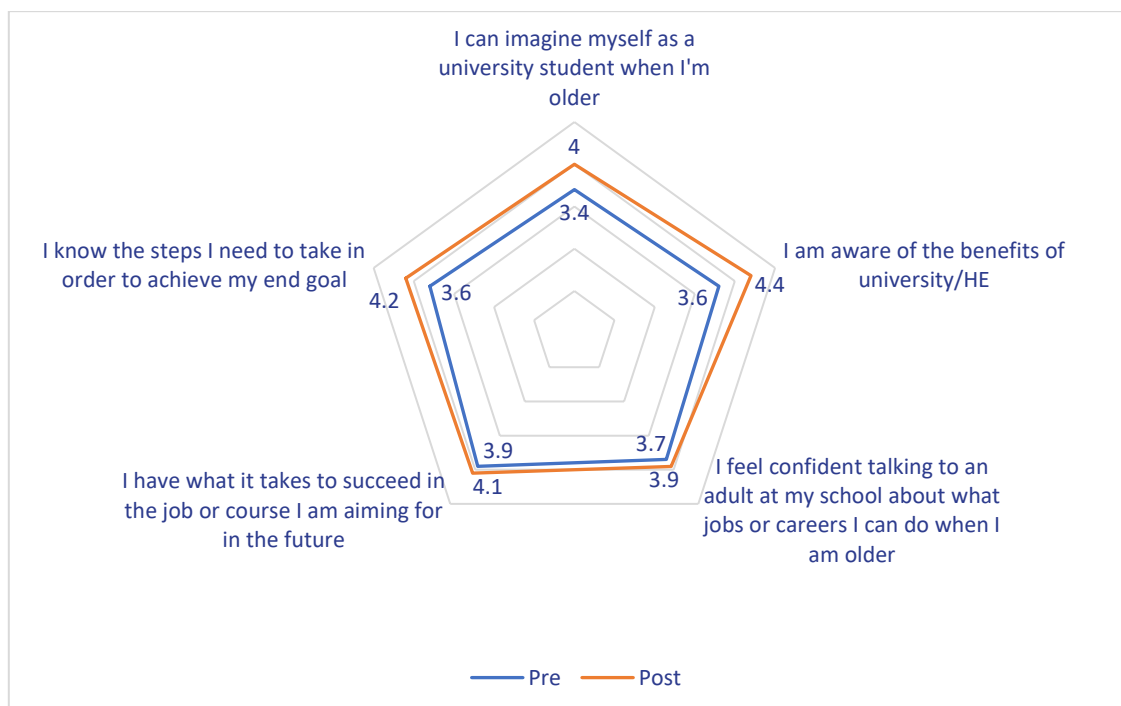


Figure 3: Comparison of participant's average scores pre and post event

Participants began from a generally positive starting point and evidenced improvement in all six questions. The strongest pre-event scores were recorded for *'I have what it takes to succeed in the job or course I am aiming for'*. This may indicate that the students have a strong sense of confidence in their potential to succeed. The lowest pre-event scores were for *'I can imagine myself as a university student when I am older'*. This may reflect a lack of exposure to university options at the student's current stage in education, or a lack of understanding of what the local university options are. The greatest distance travelled in results was shown in *'I am aware of the benefits of university/HE'* with a score increase of 0.8, followed by *'I can imagine myself as a university student when I am older'* and *'I know the steps I need to take in order to achieve my goals'*, both with an improvement score of 0.6. Score improvement in these areas suggests that, throughout the day, students gained a clearer understanding of their options at HE how to reach their chosen goal.

It is worth noting that the three areas which showed the greatest increase in scores were also the three areas with the lowest pre-event scores. This may suggest that students already possessed the skills to score highly on these questions, but lacked the information and knowledge required to do so during the pre-event survey. The increase in score recorded on the post-event survey may indicate that students felt they were given access to this knowledge and information during the event.

Additional Open Question Analysis

Answers for these questions were collated and grouped by theme referenced.

Q: The thing I am most looking forward to about the university visit is...

The three most common themes for answering this question were 'campus tour' (28%), 'information about the university/HE' (20%), and 'activities' (17%). Additional themes identified included: socialising with Service children from a range of schools and enthusiasm for an off-school campus trip with the provision of lunch.

Q: My favourite part of the university visit today was...

Two themes stood out in the answers to this question; 'campus tour' (52%) and 'activity' (27%). This shows the majority of students found the campus tour to be their favourite part of the day, in line with the largest group of answers from the previous question. A large number of participants (19%) referenced social aspects of the day such as socialising within sessions and during the dedicated lunch period.

Q: I have had the chance to talk about my experiences of being a Service child today through conversation or badge making

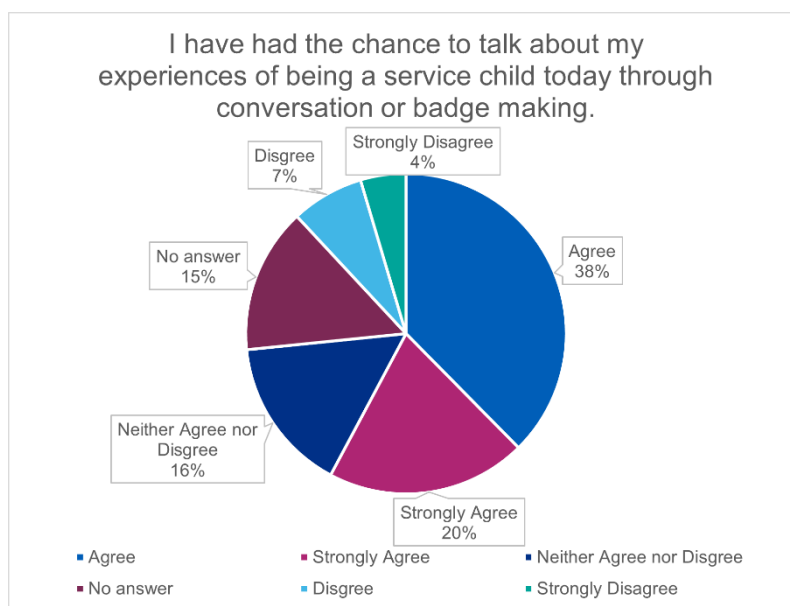


Figure 4: Participant answers to post survey Q23

Data from this question shows that the majority of students agreed with the above statement, with a total of 58% of students indicating 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. 11% of students disagreed or strongly disagreed, with a further 31% either not answering or choosing not to agree or disagree. This suggests that, whilst the discussion phases of the events were successful for more than half of the students, there is room for improvement in this area.

Q: You could make the activities better by...

Some students made suggestions for adapting the activities and tours. Students requested longer tours and more time to see inside specific buildings (computing, engineering and science labs) and student accommodation rooms. Students also requested to be on their feet more, with less time sat down during the sessions.

Teacher Feedback

The data here represents 16 teachers across all three Creative Forces events. Please see appendices for full breakdown of each question. The overall feedback from teachers was extremely positive, with all teachers indicating either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' on the following questions:

- *The Creative Forces day has engaged my students*
- *As a result of the Creative Forces day, my students have an increased knowledge of the academic and social benefits of HE*
- *As a result of the Creative Forces day, my students are more familiar with a university environment.*

Teachers indicated that they were more able to express their student's strengths and experiences in relation to progression opportunities, with 68% indicating 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this statement.

Teachers also indicated that they felt more confident using learner voice to inform practice, with 62% indicating 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this statement.

Q: What do you think are the key things that your students will take away from this event?

Teachers' responses to this question identified the following themes:

- Benefits of firsthand experience on a local university campus
- Benefits of social interaction with other Service children and considering how these feed into university life
- Increased knowledge of HE in the following categories:
 - General knowledge of HE
 - Pathways in to HE
 - Benefits of HE

Q: What opportunities for practice and development has this event helped you identify?

Teachers' responses to this question identified the following themes:

- Intention to increase the number of opportunities to work with Service children within their school
- Intention to increase collaboration between Service children within school through clubs or additional trips
- Recognition of the importance of working with Service children in non-academic sessions such as wellbeing and understanding identity sessions

Findings and Opportunities for Future Development

The evaluation findings indicate that Creative Forces events had a positive benefit for Service children attending in the following areas:

- Participants are better able to see themselves attending university in the future
- Participants are more aware of the benefits of attending university/HE
- Participants are more aware of the steps needed to take them in to HE from their current position
- Participants are more confident that they possess the necessary skills and information to achieve their goals
- Participants are more confident talking to an adult in their school about future jobs and career opportunities
- Participants enjoyed the socialisation aspects of the day and placed a significant emphasis on this. Participants were interested in social aspects of university, and these drew the most questions during campus tours.

The evaluation findings indicate that Creative Forces events could benefit from:

- Helping participants identify specific adults in their school or network who can provide detailed information, advice and guidance on future jobs and career opportunities, including routes into and through HE
- Offering 'hands on' activities specific to the HE campus the event is being hosted on, with a focus on STEM providers such as computing, sciences and engineering
- Consider the length of the campus tour and include STEM laboratories and student accommodation where appropriate
- Increasing and identifying specific opportunities for participants to discuss their experiences of being a Service child
- Qualitative responses to the post-event survey and anecdotal evidence gathered on event days suggests that participants would prefer to have more students of their own age present at each event
- Ensuring teachers are involved in sessions to develop relationships with Service pupils
- Working with schools to identify and overcome barriers to pupils from Year 10 and above attending Creative Forces events

Appendices

For appendices and raw data, please contact: linchigher@bishopg.ac.uk