

Creative Forces 2018/19 Evaluation Report

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Summary

Creative Forces events offer children from military service families (“Service children”) the opportunity to engage with higher education through a day of activities at a university campus. As a result of their participation, students indicated greater levels of awareness of the character and opportunities of university life. Despite starting from a high baseline, they indicated more positive dispositions towards higher education specifically. They also tended to indicate a clearer sense of whether and how they could progress to a range of destinations including higher education. The participant feedback indicates the potential of substantial engagement with higher education in promoting stronger knowledge of, and attitudes towards, higher education. Further work is needed to ascertain the longer-term impact of such events and to disaggregate the influence of Creative Forces from participants’ other experiences in education and their wider lives.

Acknowledgements

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About Creative Forces

A Creative Forces Day gives Higher Education Institutions an opportunity to bring Service children from a variety of schools together to experience a day on a university campus and explore their identity as Service children. It is also an opportunity to build the capacity of schools to understand and support their Service children.

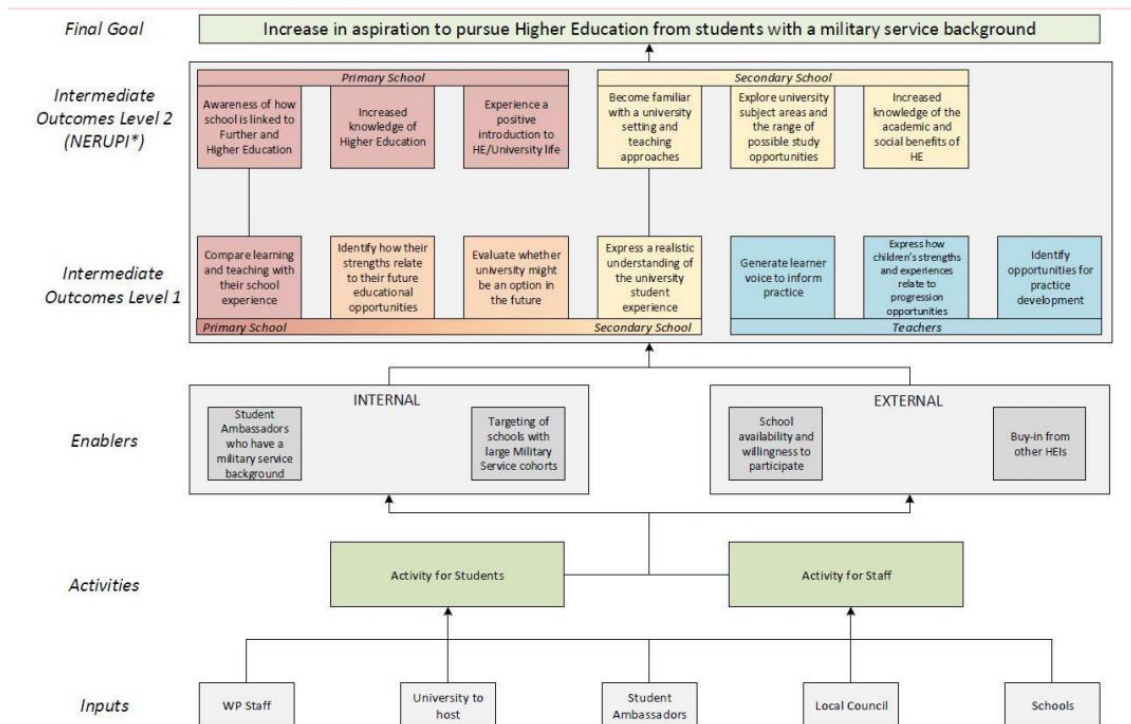
There is no single formula for a Creative Forces event. The character of the day will be influenced by such factors as the host institution’s subject expertise, the characteristics and needs of the local Service child population, and the needs of participating schools. Events will be tailored towards either a primary school or secondary school audience. However, a typical Creative Forces event would involve activities such as: academic taster sessions; a tour of the HE campus; and opportunities for Service children to discuss their experiences and the support they receive at school. School staff may also be offered bespoke CPD and/or

information sessions. Activities will be supported by student ambassadors who may themselves have military family backgrounds.

In the context of Creative Forces, Service children are defined as children whose parents or carers serve in the armed forces, or have served at any point during the child’s lifetime. Participants are typically selected by local schools, who will bring small groups of Service children and potentially also non-Service friends of Service children.

The overall goal of Creative Forces is to increase aspirations to pursue higher education amongst students with a military service background. The intermediate outcomes anticipated, mapped against the NERUPI framework, are described in the following logic model:

Creative Forces Day Logic Chain



*Hayton, A., & Bengry-Howell, A. (2016). Theory, evaluation, and practice in widening participation: A framework approach to assessing impact. *London Review of Education*, 14(3): 41-53.

Evaluation method

The evaluation consisted of:

- Impact data gathered from students pre- and post-event via paper questionnaires
- Questionnaire data gathered from teachers electronically following the event

Given the very low number of teachers that chose to respond to the follow-up questionnaire, this data will not be presented here.

Secondary school students were asked to rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1 to 10 with the following statements:

- University is for people like me
- I think that going to university would give me valuable life skills
- I know what student life would be like
- I know what courses are available at university
- I could go to university if I wanted to
- I think that going to university would give me more career options
- I feel that I would have the support I need at university
- I feel motivated to do well in my current studies

Additionally, secondary school students were also asked the following open-ended questions:

- How has your thinking changed about higher education?
- How would you improve this event?
- State one positive aspect you will remember from this event

Primary school students were asked a simpler set of evaluation questions. Again, they were asked to rate their level of agreement against a range of statements:

- I would like to go to university when I'm older
- I could go to university if I wanted to
- I can succeed at most things if I try hard
- I understand why people go to university
- I would make a good university student when I'm older
- I understand the differences between school and university

They were also asked whether the event had given them any ideas about what they would like to do after school, what could have improved the event, and what their favourite thing about the event was.

Quantitative responses were compiled and averages pre- and post-event were taken across the entire cohort. Qualitative responses were collated and analysed by theme.

Evaluation outcomes

Primary school events

The data here represents a total of 76 participants across two Creative Forces primary school events. Demographic data was collected regarding participants' parents' branch and rank:

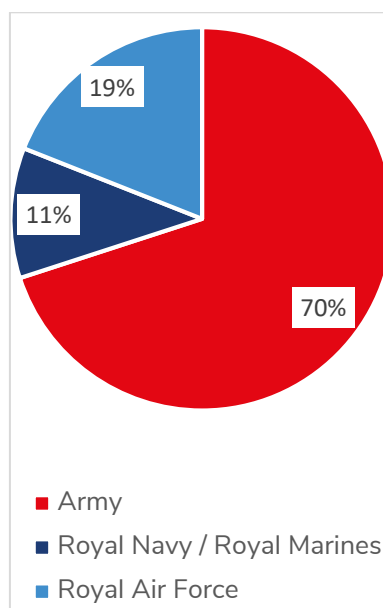


Figure 1: primary age participants by parental branch of service

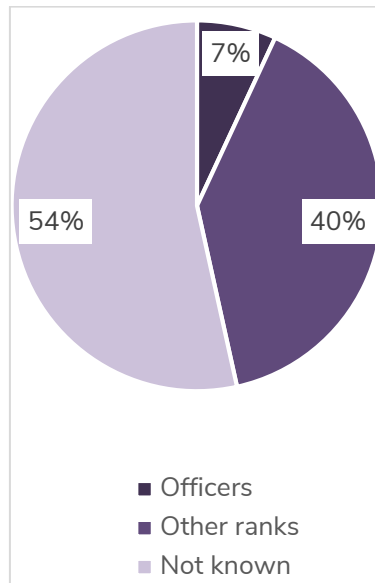


Figure 2: primary age participants by parental rank

The majority of participants’ parents were associated with the Army. A substantial number of participants were unable to describe their parents’ rank of service; of those that could, a large majority reported being children of other ranks.

The following radar plot indicates the average responses pre- and post-event. Note that not every participant responded consistently to every statement pre- and post-event, so the average scores presented here are based on the actual responses received. See appendix for response rates per question:

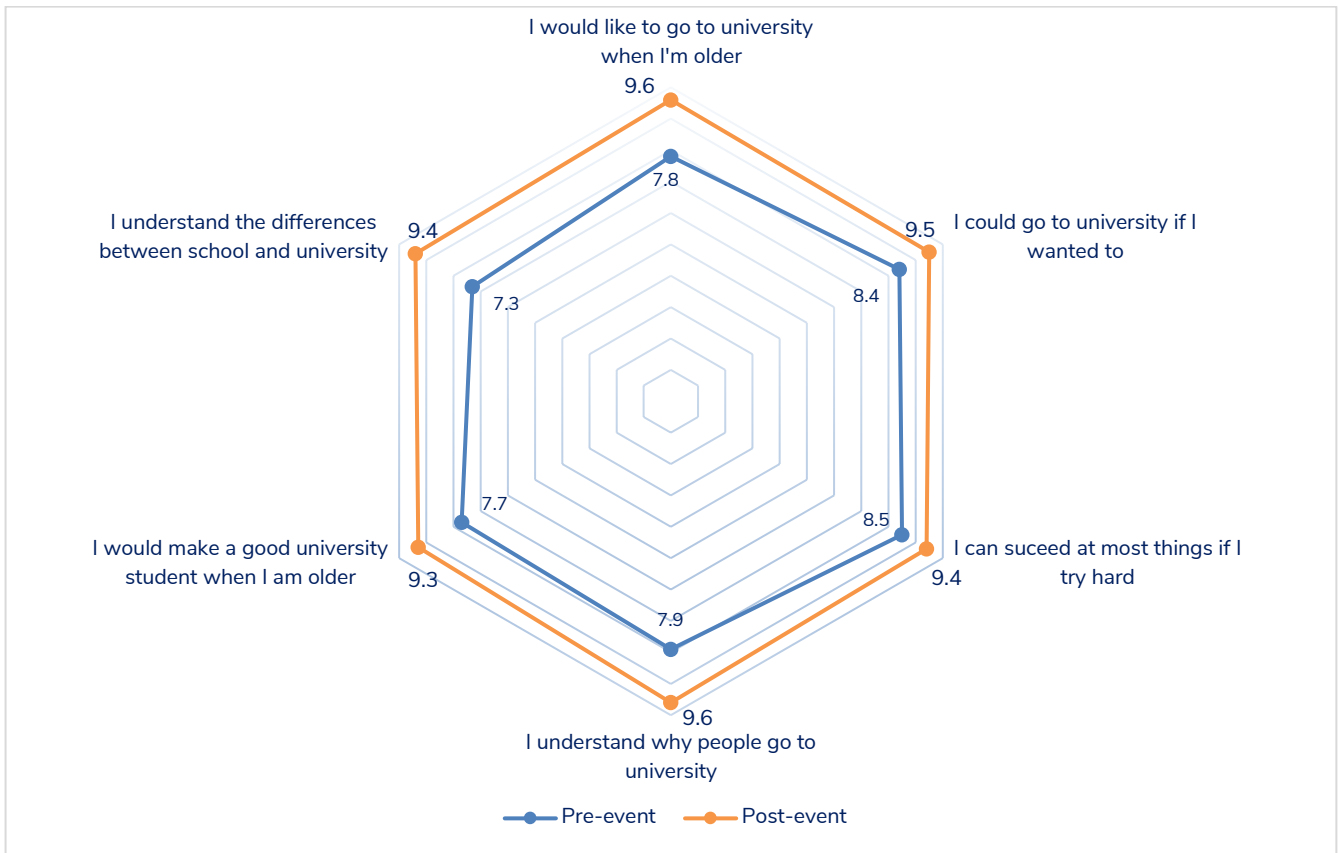


Figure 3: pre- and post-event responses by primary age participants

Participants began from a generally positive starting point overall, and evidenced improved dispositions on all six questions. The strongest pre-event scores were for “I could go to university if I wanted to” and “I can succeed at most things if I try hard”. This perhaps indicates a strong latent self-image as a learner and a sense of confidence that they can succeed. The lower starting point for “I would make a good university student when I am older” may reflect an expected lack of understanding of what being a university student entails. The greatest distances travelled were for questions that imply factual knowledge and understanding of higher education.

Q: Has today given you any ideas about what you want to do when you leave school?

83% of participants indicated that the event had given them ideas about what they would like to do following school.

Q: What ideas has it given you?

The two major categories of response focused on progression to HE and ambitions to do a particular job. Eighteen participants indicated that the event had made them want to go on to university, with only two identifying particular subjects of study. Twenty participants identified particular career goals. The majority of roles cited were non-graduate roles such as acting, modelling and sports. The graduate roles cited were medicine (human and veterinary) and teaching. Four participants expressed a desire to enter the forces.

Other responses were less specific (“College”, “Lots I could fill this paper”, “It has given me the idea to focus on the thing I want to do”), while a small number appeared to misunderstand the question. Interestingly, one participant expressed the desire to start an army club in their school following the event.

Q: What was your favourite thing about today?

The vast majority of responses focused on two aspects: the opportunity to see aspects of the university; and the specific activities in which they participated. Participants enjoyed seeing the range of facilities on campus, with media and film facilities particularly popular. One particular activity (a doodling workshop) was cited by 32 participants. Very few responses focused on pastoral or emotional topics.

Q: What could we do to make today better?

The vast majority of responses suggested no changes, with a number explicitly stating that it was a good event (“Nothing, it’s been awesome”, “Nothing! U RULE!”). A smaller number of responses suggested having different activities or improving the activities on offer, and having more time generally or for particular aspects of the day. Six participants expressed the wish to see more of the campus, to see student accommodation or to see students at work.

Secondary school events

The data here represents a total of 75 participants across four Creative Forces secondary school events.

Participants were asked to state their parents’ branch of service, rank and service status (full time/regular, reservist, other):

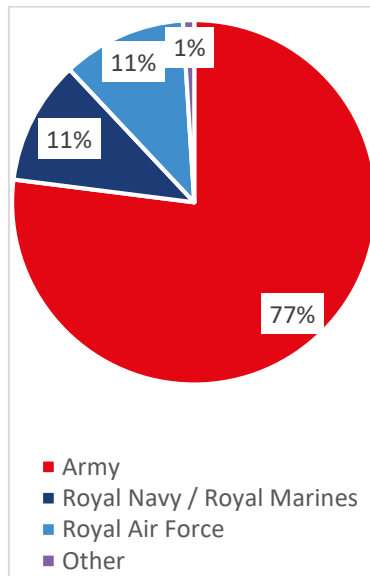


Figure 4: secondary age participants by parental branch of service

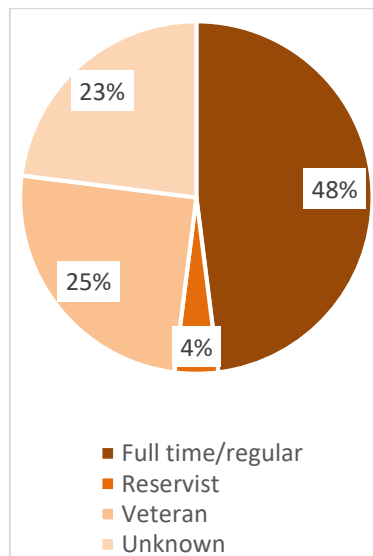


Figure 5: secondary age participants by parental service status

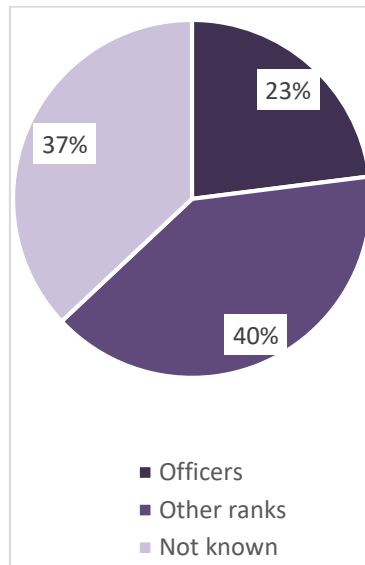
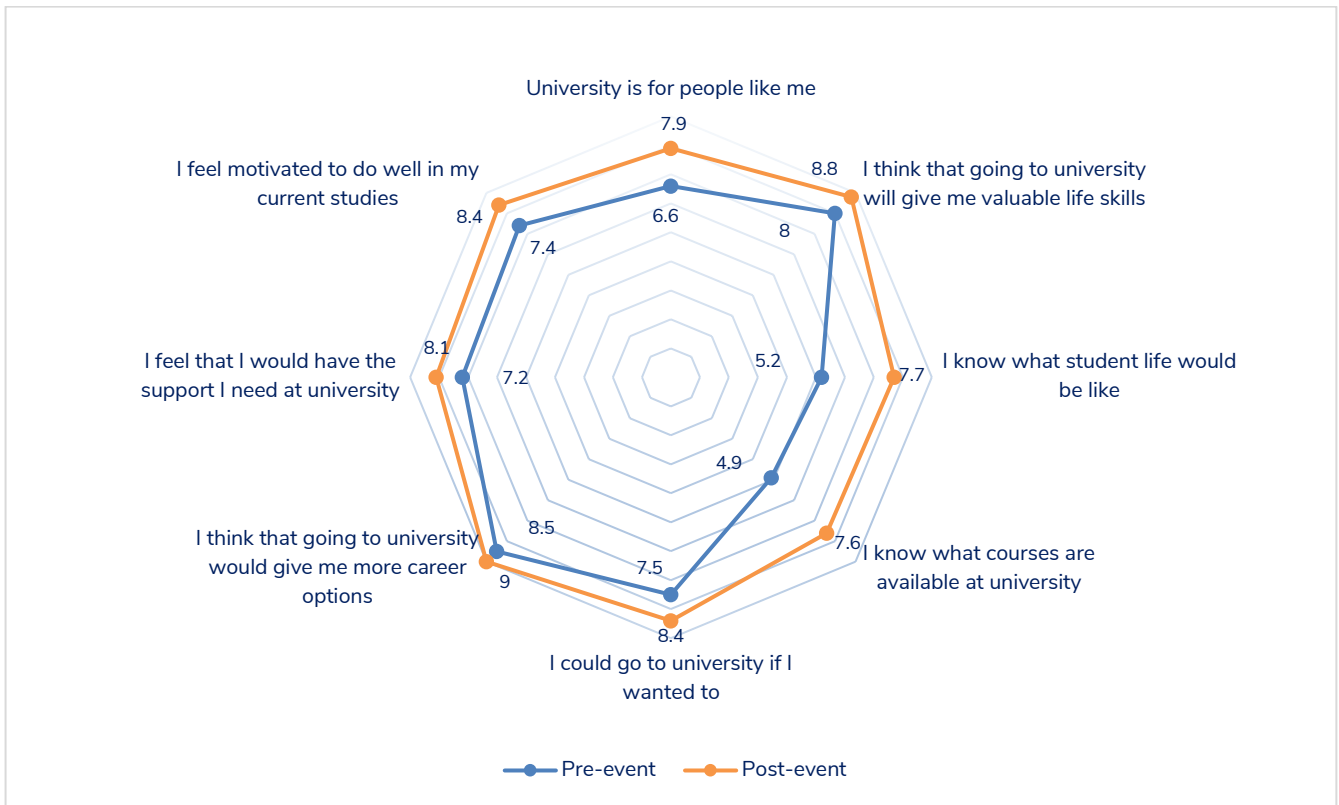


Figure 6: secondary age participants by parental rank

More than three quarters of participants indicated family affiliation with the army. Almost half indicated that they had a parent who was serving full-time, while a quarter indicated that their parents were veterans. Almost a quarter were not sure as to their parent’s service status. Compared with primary school participants, fewer secondary school participants (37%) were unable to state their parents’ rank. The secondary school sample included more children of officers than the primary school sample, but these still accounted for less than a quarter of the participants.

The following radar plot indicates the average responses pre- and post-event. Note that not every participant responded consistently to every statement pre- and post-event, so the average scores presented here are based on the actual responses received. See appendix for response rates per question:



Similarly to the primary school participants, secondary school participants began from a high base in terms of their motivation towards learning and their potential to go to university. Secondary participants also carried latently positive views on the value of higher education to their life skills and their career options. Conversely, they expressed less of a sense of understanding of university life and the range of courses available pre-event.

Participants' average responses increased across all questions post-event. The greatest changes occurred for those questions addressing the specifics of university life ("I know what student life would be like", "I know what courses are available at university"). Participants also expressed greater agreement that support would be available to them at university, while participants expressed greater motivation to succeed and that they could go to university if they wanted to.

Participants more strongly agreed that university was for people like them post-event than pre-event.

Q: How has your thinking changed about higher education?

The most common form of response was to indicate that their thinking had not changed. While several chose to give no reason, some participants indicated that they were already aiming to go to university.

Of those that indicated a change in thinking, some suggested that their dispositions towards education had improved. In some cases this suggested a dispelling of worries or concerns:

“I feel more comfortable about the concept of it and I feel less worried”

“I no longer think University is strict and hard”

Some indicated that they saw greater value in higher education:

“Yes because it makes me feel if you try harder rewards will happen”

A second theme of responses related to improved knowledge of higher education, particularly the range of options and opportunities open to students:

“I believe I can get into university now I know the different routes I can take”

“There’s so many pathways so I feel encouraged”

Other responses were non-specific regarding changes in thinking about higher education.

Q: State one aspect you will remember from this event

The largest group of responses to this question centred on the specific activities undertaken as part of the Creative Forces event. Academic tasters such as cyber security, criminology, sociology and art were identified by participants.

A smaller group of responses focused on the opportunities to share their experiences of being Service children, and also to share what was happening in other schools. One participant appreciated that:

“They let us share our thoughts about army life”

Another cited:

“Meeting new people and being able to let out what’s been blocked up inside of me with doodling and writing”

Other responses highlighted the specific learning about university (*“The indepth information”*), the opportunity to experience a sense of support and/or belonging (*“Realising there is support for forces kids”*) and the development of personal qualities (*“That anything is possible”*).

Q: *How would you improve the event?*

Participants offered a variety of suggestions for improvement. These included:

- Having a greater range of activities or more choice of activities;
- Reviewing timings to e.g. have more time for breaks or a campus tour;
- Encouraging more mixing and interaction between schools;
- Making some aspects of the day more engaging or interesting; and
- Having a greater emphasis on Service life.

Discussion and opportunities for future development

The participant evaluation findings offer evidence that Creative Forces contributes to the following outcomes:

Compare learning and teaching with their school experience; Explore university subject areas and the range of possible study options

Primary-age participants indicated strongly that they understood the differences between school and university post-event. The content of Creative Forces events can vary from event to event due, for example, to differences in subject specialisms between institutions or the availability of suitable and willing leaders of subject taster sessions. However, a large number of participants (primary and secondary) indicated that the subject taster sessions

were the element that they would remember. Such sessions therefore have the potential to illustrate the similarities and differences with teaching and learning in school. Indeed, a number of participants also requested a wider range of subject tasters or the ability to do more, which also suggests the potential enthusiasm of participants for exploring a range of academic disciplines.

Identify how their strengths relate to their future educational opportunities

Primary-age participants tended to indicate post-event that they would make for good university students, and also indicated positive senses of their ability to succeed through effort. Post-event, secondary students indicated a stronger sense that they were motivated to succeed in their studies.

Evaluate whether university might be an option in the future

Post-event, secondary students indicated a stronger sense that university was for people like them, and that they could go to university if they wanted to. Qualitative responses elicited several primary participants who expressed an ambition to go on to university, while a number of secondary participants suggested that greater understanding of university itself and the routes into higher education had improved their dispositions towards HE.

Express a realistic understanding of the university student experience

Secondary participants indicated significant increases in their knowledge of student life and course availability post-event. Qualitative responses included the resolving of worries or concerns, suggesting that the very act of seeing a higher education setting makes a contribution to forming an understanding of student experience. However, some primary participants suggested that it would be beneficial to be able to see university students at work; this would require staging Creative Forces events during university semesters, something that is not always practicable.

Awareness of how school is linked to further and higher education

A number of primary participants suggested that the event had persuaded them to go to college and then university, while a number of secondary participants identified the range of routes to higher education.

Increased knowledge of higher education

Amongst secondary participants, questions relating to factual ideas about student life and studying at higher education saw the greatest increases from the lowest bases. This is perhaps unsurprising given that participants are only likely to have had limited contact with higher education before attending Creative Forces. Secondary participants also associated greater knowledge of higher education with improved dispositions and a greater sense of having the opportunity to progress. Primary participants indicated a greater understanding of the differences between school and university, and many noted that the opportunity to see a higher education setting was itself the most memorable thing about the event.

Experience a positive introduction to HE/university life

Primary participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the event, with many positive comments suggesting that there was nothing that could have improved on the event. A number of participants identified the friendliness and respectful attitude of people on campus as being a highlight, while secondary participants indicated a stronger sense that they would be able to access support while at university post-event. A small number of participants suggested that the event could be made more interesting, but these were very much the minority.

Become familiar with a university setting and teaching approaches

As noted, the academic taster activities were among the most memorable aspects of the day for both primary and secondary participants. A number of participants mentioned enjoying a cyber security activity in particular. This suggests that some form of immersion in the academic life of higher education is viewed as a benefit, particularly where it can provide a contrast with the day-to-day experience in school.

Increased knowledge of the academic and social benefits of HE

Secondary-age participants indicated a strong awareness of the benefits of HE pre-event, and these appeared to be reinforced following the event. Some secondary participants indicated greater personal value in HE such as the rewards of hard work. Primary-age participants reported an increased understanding of why people go to university post-event. However, a significant number of primary participants expressed the desire to pursue non-

graduate careers, possibly as an immediate reaction to seeing facilities such as TV studios on campus.

Limitations of the evaluation

There are a number of key limitations to the inferences that may be drawn from this evaluation:

1. Creative Forces events can differ in content and character between delivering institutions. Therefore, it is not possible to infer a causal link between elements of the events and later outcomes;
2. The evaluation does not take into account prior engagement with or exposure to higher education, thus participants may already be starting from a high base in terms of their perceptions of future educational opportunities;
3. It is not possible to address the potential effects of the intersection of participants' characteristics and prior experiences due to insufficient data;
4. Since a significant number of participants expressed family association with the Army, the findings are not necessarily representative of the diversity of Service experience;
5. The evaluation represents a snapshot of changes in perceptions pre- and post-event. As a result, further work is needed to understand the longer-term impact of participation;
6. The limited amount of feedback obtained from school staff makes triangulation a challenge.

Appendix

List of evaluation questions and respondent numbers.

Primary events

Question	n
I would like to go to university when I'm older (pre-event)	75
I would like to go to university when I'm older (post-event)	69
I could go to university if I wanted (pre-event)	73
I could go to university if I wanted (post-event)	70
I can succeed at most things if I try hard (pre-event)	75
I can succeed at most things if I try hard (post-event)	68
I understand why people go to university (pre-event)	74
I understand why people go to university (post-event)	69
I would make a good university student (pre-event)	74
I would make a good university student (post-event)	70
I understand the differences between school and university (pre-event)	74
I understand the differences between school and university (post-event)	68
Has today given you any ideas about what you want to do when you leave school?	71
What ideas has it given you?	57
What could we do to make today better?	62
What was your favourite thing about today?	71
Would you recommend the event to a friend?	73

Secondary events

Question	n
University is for people like me (pre-event)	73
University is for people like me (post-event)	69
I think that going to university would give me valuable life skills (pre-event)	73
I think that going to university would give me valuable life skills (post-event)	67
I know what student life would be like (pre-event)	73
I know what student life would be like (post	69
I know what courses are available at university (pre-event)	73
I know what courses are available at university (post-event)	69
I could go to university if I wanted to (pre-event)	73
I could go to university if I wanted to (post-event)	68
I think that going to university would give me more career options (pre-event)	72
I think that going to university would give me more career options (post-event)	67
I feel that I would have the support I need at university (pre-event)	73
I feel that I would have the support I need at university (post-event)	69
I feel motivated to do well in my current studies (pre-event)	73
I feel motivated to do well in my current studies(post-event)	69
How has your thinking changed about Higher Education?	66
How would you improve the event?	59
State one aspect you will remember from this event	63
Would you recommend the event to a friend?	72