

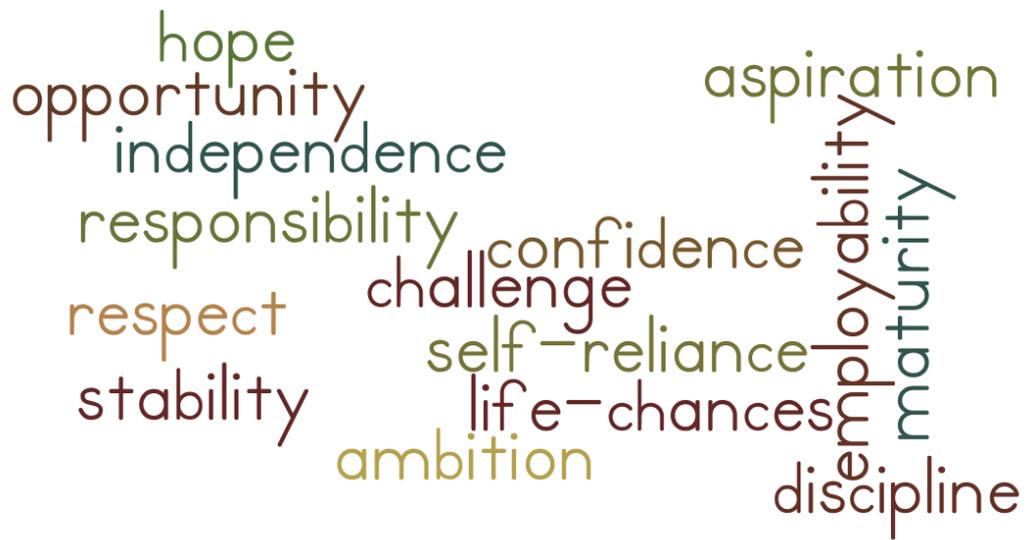


SKILLS for **ARMED FORCES**
Developing skills for national security

Valuing Learning: A Social Impact Evaluation of the Bicton Military Academy

Executive Summary





Skills for Armed Forces and Skills for Justice are part of JSSC group, which is an independent, employer-led charity enabling employers and employees across the world to develop skills for success.

JSSC group is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the UK justice, frontline services and professional services sectors.

Executive Summary

The Concept of a Military Academy

The model of a Residential Military and Public Services (MaPS) Academy (Level 2/Level 3 residential course at Bicton College) was developed in an attempt to reduce initial training withdrawals within the Armed Forces and to provide an outstanding opportunity for young people to undertake a unique learning experience. The concept was supported by the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines. The concept presented a revolutionary opportunity to create a culture of continuous improvement and excellence, crucial to the recruitment and retention process within HM Forces.

It was envisaged that the Academy programme would contribute significantly to the development of students intellectually, physically and emotionally. Those students who decided not to pursue a military career would gain immeasurable life skills ; ultimately providing benefit to wider society in terms of helping to transform young people into motivated, reliable and trustworthy individuals who can contribute effectively to the economy of the UK. For the majority of students who successfully completed the programme, the Academy would act as an educational and vocational gateway adding considerably to their potential for social mobility both in the military and society as a whole.

The ethos

The project aimed to bring about a fundamentally different way to approach a national education issue whilst meeting an emerging requirement of the British Armed Forces, with a view to:

- Providing a partnership between the state education sector and the British Armed Forces in order to deliver the underpinning educational content required within initial military training.
- Developing the environment and expertise within Further Education Colleges to respond to the potential needs of Armed Forces and other Public Services.
- Creating centres of excellence capable of developing high quality potential recruits.
- Contributing to wider societal benefit within education by integrating general societal and military values.

The main objectives of the Military and Public Services Academy were as follows:

- To inform students of the many career options within the Armed Forces and wider Public Services

- To prepare students for a life in the military or uniformed public services by providing a structured and disciplined platform within a residential setting.
- To soften the important transition from civilian to life in the public service.
- To support learners to complete a BTEC in uniform public services at levels 2 or 3.
- To support learners to achieve a minimum of functional skills level 1 in English and Maths (minimum entry for the military).
- To conduct individual development training throughout the course by providing study and organisational skills.
- To promote team work, ethos and resourcefulness.
- To introduce students to the Armed Forces Careers Office (AFCO) and Uniformed Public Service recruitment teams.
- To promote and develop basic life skills

Evaluation methodology

In July 2012 Skills for Armed Forces was commissioned by Bicton College to carry out an outcomes *evaluation* of the MaPS course. This would include attempts to measure the *social value* created through the students' participation in this particular style of residential learning.

The research was structured as follows¹:

- A pre-course baseline survey of students - this provided a picture of students' expectations, aspirations and ambitions which could be tracked through the course of their learning.
- Personal diaries - students were asked to complete weekly diaries for the first quarter of the course in order to get them to think about their experience and record it.
- Mid-course survey - a follow-up survey which enabled comparators with the baseline survey. For those students completing level 2, this would be their final survey.
- Case studies – In order to bring more personality to the evaluation, 6 students kindly agreed to take part in more depth-interviews to draw out some of their individual stories. The case studies appear throughout this report as snapshots – all names are changed to protect anonymity.

¹ Please refer to the Annex for respective documentation of research activities

- Focus group work - 4 focus groups were held at various points in the students learning. These helped to expand the themes emerging from the surveys and allowed students to begin to develop their ideas around social value. The social return on investment calculations were achieved through intensive consultation with those students remaining on the course.
- Informal discussions with staff and parents – at various points throughout the course e.g. passing-out celebration.
- Final survey – this covered those students pursuing level 3
- Validation survey – this was conducted as a final check to confirm the social/personal impacts of the course
- Social Return on Investment assessment (SROI) – in gathering all the evidence from the above activity, an assessment of the social value created by the students' experience will be conducted. This involved a measure of inputs, intended/unintended changes, outputs, outcomes, value of outcomes and impact.

The main objectives of the overall evaluation were to:

- *baseline expectations, aspirations, ambitions*
- *measure experiences against expectations*
- *monitor progress towards ambitions and aspirations*
- *determine the extent to which intended outcomes had been achieved*
- *capture unintended outcomes*
- *understand the impact on life-skills*
- *provide a measure of social value/potential social value (student focused)*

Course structure

The course consists of a number of distinctive features that individually might not be remarkable but taken in combination contribute to the unique experience of students and staff. For example, the delivery within a residential environment, a military academy style approach, the teaching of functional skills and a curriculum that encompasses the opportunity to gain additional qualifications.

Level 2

- 25 week fully integrated Public Service and Military residential course consisting of 6 modules.
- On completion students can progress directly towards entry into the uniformed public services, continue on to a higher-level academic course, undertake further military development or move into other civilian employment.

Level 3

The course is broken down into 3 parts:

- Part 1 – a 25 week initial subsidiary diploma (6 Modules) - equivalent to 1 A'level.
- Part 2 – a further 11 weeks learning to complete a 1 year diploma (further 3 modules) - equivalent to 1.5 A'levels.
- Part 3 – a further 1 year (35 weeks) to complete the remaining 9 modules and obtain the 2 year extended diploma – Total 18 modules equivalent to 3 A'levels
- In addition, more advanced military skills during the Diploma and Extended diploma to ensure currency and development.
- For the 2013-14 course, the offer has been consolidated to a one year Diploma and a two year Extended Diploma

In addition the students take English and Maths Functional skills where required especially if they achieve low GCSE results and they take GCSE re-sits in English and Maths if they are on the cusp of achieving a grade C.

Research Findings

- 80% of the students are male, whereas 20% are female. This represents over 10% more than the female coverage across all the armed forces, which currently stands at 9.7% (DASA, 2012²).
- Only one of the students declared an ethnicity other than *white British* and this was *mixed race*.
- Residential study - One of the unique aspects of the MaPS course is the delivery of learning to young people within a compulsory residential context. This breaks the tie with home and gives the student independence and encourages self-sufficiency.
- The ages of the students involved ranged from 16 to 21 at the start of the course. At the younger end of this scale, the emotional impact of living away from home cannot be under-stated.
- The residential element of the course replicated the experience of the Armed Forces, with the perceived benefit that this offers no cost and less risk to the MoD and potentially avoids one of the major reasons for drop-outs.

² Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA), UK Armed Forces Quarterly Manning Report (February 2012) <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/applications/newWeb/www/apps/publications/pubViewFile.php?content=170.131&date=2012-02-09&type=html&PublishTime=09:30:00>

- For a number of students, their personal situation at home, combined with living away, put enormous strains on them.
- The students acknowledged many of the positive aspects that living independently had afforded them. These included:
 - more personal responsibility
 - independence
 - better financial acumen
 - better housekeeping
 - more pride
- At the pre-course stage, just over 10% of students thought they would have difficulties with the timetable however by mid-course, this figure was only 4.5%
- Fewer female students (75%) found the course easy compared to male students (100%).
- Fewer male students (5.9%) compared with female students (20%) found the dress code difficult to follow at the mid-course stage.
- Slightly fewer students felt interaction with students on their course was easy once they had started the course (81.8%) compared to their expectations pre-course (84.6%).
- By the end of week 25, almost a fifth of students (18.1%) found interaction with students on their own course difficult.
- During the mid-course stage, female students (40%) had a more difficult time coping with the levels of discipline compared to male students (0%).
- Almost a quarter of students (23.1%) reported feeling apprehensive about physical training before starting the course however by the mid-course stage, only 9% of students reported feeling this way with 81.8% of students enjoying it.
- Before starting the course, over a quarter (26.9%) of students did not look forward to the drill element yet by the mid-course stage this figure had reduced to only 9.1% with 72.8% of students enjoying this aspect of the course.
- Many students held high expectations of the weapon training/shooting element of the course (80.7%) – these were on the whole met as 77.2% of students reported enjoying this element.
- Personal administration proved unexpectedly popular with 81.8% of students reportedly enjoying this course element yet at the pre-course stage, 20% of students did not look forward to it with only 64% of students looking forward to it.

- After the first 25 weeks, 55% of students reported that the course had provided them with increased leisure opportunities.
- 15% of students reported no change in their leisure activity compared to 9% of the pre-course students who thought they would see no change in their leisure activity once having started the course.
- The majority of Level 2 students expected to progress into the military or the Public Service however slightly more students expected to follow this route at the pre-course stage.
- 80% of Level 3 students wanted to remain in education on a higher level course yet at the pre-course stage, only 66.7% of students expected to progress in this manner.
- Confidence levels in being able to take part in the course have risen from 84.6% pre-course to just over 95% after 25 weeks.

Impact on life skills

| Fig 1. How life skills have changed whilst at Bicton | | | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| % of responses | | | | | |
| <i>Life Skill</i> | <i>I'm much better at the task</i> | <i>I've improved little</i> | <i>I already did this task before</i> | <i>I can do it but choose not to</i> | <i>I still can't do the task</i> |
| Washing clothes | 61.5 | 15.4 | 23.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Washing dishes | 30.8 | 15.4 | 53.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Cooking | 15.4 | 23.1 | 61.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Healthy eating | 23.1 | 30.8 | 30.8 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| Repairing clothes/gadgets | 23.1 | 23.1 | 38.5 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| Ironing | 46.2 | 30.8 | 23.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Cleaning | 46.2 | 23.1 | 30.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Swimming | 30.8 | 23.1 | 30.8 | 7.7 | 7.7 |
| Other sports | 38.5 | 23.1 | 30.8 | 7.7 | 0 |
| Other life skills | 33.3 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 0 | 16.7 |

Achievements

- 28 students enrolled on the course and there was a 100% successful completion rate (measured against a 6% average drop-out at the College).
- 2 students joined from other areas.
- All 11 students entered for level 2 students successfully completed the course
 - Of these:
 - 3 went on to secure employment in the Armed Forces
 - 4 are about to complete the entry process into the Armed Forces – all p/t
 - 2 went on to level 3 (MaPs)
 - 1 went into full time employment
 - 1 went on to a level 3 course at another college
- All 17 students entered for level 3 successfully completed the course at Diploma level.
 - Of these:
 - 3 went on to secure employment in the Armed Forces
 - 14 went on to further education to complete the 2 year extended diploma.
- Functional Skills – as a result of the course 18 students achieved the Maths and English levels required for the armed forces.
- Pre-join Test - to date 6 students have passed the final Pre-Joining Tests (PJT) at either Pirbright for the Army or Commando Training Centre Royal Marines (CTCRM) with all 6 achieving an 'A' standard. This translates to a 75-85% chance of being successful in future armed forces training.³

Measuring Social Impact

A social return on investment (SROI) study was conducted to determine if (and how) much social value might be created by (and for) three stakeholder groups. These groups (the students, their parents/guardians and Bicton College) all invested time, effort and resource over the first year of the course.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring and accounting for a much broader concept of value than that which is measured in purely financial terms. SROI

³ Evidence gathered by the Institute of Naval Medicine at CTCRM show those students who achieve an A on the these PJTs have a 75 -85% chance of successfully completing training. B grades 65-75% and C grades only a 50 – 50% chance.

incorporates social, environmental and economic costs and benefits in measuring the changes that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It is a story about change that includes case studies and qualitative, quantitative and financial information. The SROI mapped the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts as valued by the stakeholders.

In taking into account all the debate, reasoning, discussion and assessment, the following final (valued) inputs and outcomes were reported by the stakeholders:⁴

| Stakeholder | Total value of inputs | Total value of changes |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Young people (students) | £11,000.00 | £116,620.66 |
| Parents/Guardians | £61,680.00 | £117,162.00 |
| Bicton College | £100,000.00 | £214,060.00 |
| Total | £172,680.00 | £447,842.66 |

To calculate the social value ratio, the total value of changes (£447,842.66) is divided by the total value of inputs (£172,680.00.)

Consequently, based on a rigorous evaluation of the three key stakeholders and calculating their assessment of inputs and valued changes, for every £1 invested in the course by the three key stakeholders, £2.59 is returned in social value.

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Total value of changes | £447,842.66 |
| Total value of inputs | £172,680.00 |
| Social Return £ per £ | £2.59 |

Conclusions

The 4 Rs

If it is true that old-style academic learning concentrated on the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) then it could be claimed that, in terms of their workforce, new-style military thinking is concentrated on the 4 Rs (readiness, recruitment, retention, reservists). In respect of these 4 Rs, the MaPS course undeniably provides the armed services and the Ministry of Defence with some food for thought.

Readiness

⁴ A validation and sensitivity exercise was undertaken to ensure that the data used was an accurate reflection of stakeholder views and that outcomes and proxies ascribed were rigorously challenged before arriving at the final SROI value.

The course has provided students with a real grounding in what to expect from a career in the armed forces. If not the finished article, they are more-ready for action. The students are physically equipped, mentally equipped and more importantly practically equipped for a role in the military.

Recruitment

The MaPS course has, and in all likelihood will, continue to provide a pool of future potential recruits for the armed forces. Following the first year of the course, seven students have progressed into a military career with a further four expected to join in the New Year. In total, over a third of the students on the course are embarking on new careers in the military. The MaPS course could also help to contribute to a reduction in the overall cost to the services of 16-17 year olds recruits. In 2011, figures presented to Parliament estimated that it cost £88,985 to recruit, train and pay each new soldier aged 16 and 17, compared with £42,818 for each adult recruit. This equates to a total MoD spend of between £72m and £87m per annum in excess of the estimated cost of recruiting solely from age 17.5 and over.⁵

The average recruitment process takes 7-9 months; therefore by using this type of course the student is fully assisted through the application process and gives the foundations of military ethos thereby making the most efficient use of time during the entry process. This results in a much greater chance of success for the recruit and less financial impact on the armed forces. The level 2 course, which is 9 months long, matches this entry process timeline.

Retention

For the armed forces, recruitment is only the start of a journey which hopefully continues with retention of personnel. Statistically those people taken on at a younger age (16-20 year olds) are more likely to leave the armed forces before completion of training.

“In 2010/2011, 37 per cent of minors in the British army training dropped out before completing Phase Two. Across all three services, the dropout rate for minors from initial training was almost double the average for adults.”⁶

A major factor in this relates back to *readiness* or more pointedly *un-readiness*. Often younger recruits are simply not prepared well enough for army life. The MaPS course has

⁵ http://www.child-soldiers.org/research_report_reader.php?id=337

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the potential to positively influence retention data amongst this age group. Given that the average cost of recruiting someone into the Army in financial year 2010-11 was £10,000⁷, it is safe to assume that any opportunity to lessen the risk of drop-out would be welcome. The MaPS course provides one such opportunity.

Reservists

In light of the public service cuts of recent years and through the government's *Future Reserves 2020 Programme*⁸ one of the great challenges for the armed forces is to establish a large pool of reservists. Course such as MaPS can contribute greatly to this objective – if the word *volunteers* were to be replaced by the word *students* in the following statement, it could almost read as one of the key aims of the Bicton Military and Public Service Academy:

“.....volunteers will experience a level of challenge and personal development difficult to replicate elsewhere. They will gain work, life and leadership skills which benefit them, their employers and society as a whole.”

Those students who pass the MaPS course might not automatically seek a career in the military but they could sign up as reservists at some point further down the line and in doing so they will be well suited and well equipped.

Students

There can be little doubt that the 28 students embarking on and completing this course have been involved in a unique experience through the combination of academic learning, military training and a residential environment. The overwhelming message permeating this evaluation is that the experience has had an enormous impact on the students, over and above their academic and military achievements. The main objectives of the course have been firmly met:

- Students received excellent advice and support around career options within the Armed Forces and wider Public Services
- Students received the training they needed to prepare for a life in the military or uniformed public services.
- The experience has gone beyond preparing students physically for a career in the armed forces, it has also prepared them mentally to understand the demands of such a career.

⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm111215/text/111215w0002.htm#11121511200005>

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210470/Cm8655-web_FINAL.pdf

- The course provided the students with an understanding of what the transition from civilian to life in the public service might be like.
- The course enabled 18 students, who did not have the required level of Maths and English, to achieve functional skills level 1 - minimum entry for the military.
- All students were encouraged to undertake a range of additional qualifications during the course which could be used to gain future employment. These included the National Pool Lifeguard qualification (NPLQ) and the YMCA Gym Instructors course. A large number of students completed these and applied them successfully in summer jobs.
- the course succeeded in delivering individual development training throughout the course in the form of study and organisational skills.
- Students worked (and valued working) in teams.
- One of the major successes of the course was the confidence it gave the young people - time and time again this was cited in surveys and focus groups.
- The course improved the life skills of students
- The students were provided with an innovative, alternative learning experience which provided them with better life chances.

Valuing the learning

The SROI firmly concluded that social value was created as a result of the outcomes of the course - primarily for the students but also for other stakeholders. During the sensitivity testing of the data included in the Impact Map, a number of different scenarios were tested, all of which proved positive social value. The final social value ratio (£2.59 for every £1 invested) was determined by the scope of the stakeholders, the inputs and the outcomes.

Much like the world of economics and budgets, SROI evaluations and Impact Map calculations point to only one scenario out of many possible scenarios. Slight alterations would lead to slightly different results. However based on the rigour and transparency applied throughout this evaluation it is safe to say that whatever measures were used to calculate the social value ratio and whatever alterations were made in terms of inputs, outcomes, proxies and values, the social value ratio result would have remained positive.

The running of a military style academy at Bicton was a very ambitious move and the achievements of both staff (teaching, administrative and the leadership team) and students have been laudable. The figures (repeated here again) speak for themselves – 28 students, 28 passes, no drop-outs and all students remaining in education or entering employment.

Over and above this, the decision to evaluate the course has enabled the College to obtain an independent, objective analysis alongside the very subjective views of stakeholders.

There can be little doubt that in taking the innovative decision to run the MaPS course, Bicton College have set a very high standard in terms of delivering a Military-style, residential academy that prepares students for public life, military life and more importantly, life in general.

A word cloud featuring various terms related to personal growth and development. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, with 'hope' at the top left and 'aspiration' at the top right. The words are in different colors and orientations, including horizontal, vertical, and diagonal. The terms include: hope, opportunity, independence, responsibility, respect, stability, ambition, challenge, self-reliance, life-chances, confidence, employability, maturity, discipline, and aspiration.

hope
opportunity
independence
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discipline
aspiration