



Listening to learn

Dr Michael Hall, Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Winchester, discusses the value of CPD underpinned by research

PRACTITIONERS across all phases of education recognise the value of robust evidence in supporting and improving practice. The major reason for drawing on research in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is to provide a base of evidence. The Service Children's Progression Alliance has identified demand among practitioners for a stronger and more robust evidence base to support the development of practice. Over the coming months, the SCIP Alliance and RCET will be working with schools across Scotland to build a strong evidence-base for the Thriving Lives CPD resource toolkit.

The key question, though, surrounds our motivations for engaging with evidence.

One of the key demands we have heard from practitioners is for more research with Service children to better understand their experiences. Service children are not a homogeneous group, nor are they a group that is reducible to specific disadvantages that need to be fixed. If we are to avoid a retreat into dialogues of exceptionality and disadvantage, we must engage seriously with the

diversity of experiences of Service children. This is fundamentally an ethical imperative: drawing on research with Armed Forces children helps us to show that we place their voices at the centre of our practice and that we view Service children as partners in improvement.

CPD, when underpinned by research, can achieve this systemic change. Four major principles can guide our approach. The first is to be deliberate. This means committing time and resources to listening to Service children and engaging with their experiences. This requires Service children's experiences to be at the heart of CPD activity, whether this is drawing on existing research and literature or engaging directly with the Service children for whom we are responsible.

The second is to be open. As professionals we must be willing to let go of our preconceptions and to place our firmly held convictions in doubt. We accept that we do not necessarily have all of the answers; CPD underpinned by research has the potential to provide such a challenge.

The third is to be child-centred. Being child-centred means creating opportunities for the voices of Service children to steer the

conversation about their education. CPD underpinned by research is one such opportunity for children's voices to give direction to professional conversations.

The fourth is to be willing to change. This means beginning from the presumption that our practice will change as a result of engaging CPD underpinned by research. It also means effecting genuine, meaningful, and visible change.

As Maxine Greene writes: "What matters is a quest for new ways of living together, of generating more and more incisive and inclusive dialogues." The value of evidence-based CPD lies not merely in understanding what works, but in creating openings for our children to be listened to. ■



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Review and action plan

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The Scottish Armed Forces Education Support Group (SAFESG) is a Scottish Government-chaired stakeholder group, supporting the education needs of children from Armed Forces families in Scotland.

Children from Armed Forces families bring unique experiences to schools, but we know they also may need additional support to ensure they are achieving their full potential. SAFESG will ensure the voices and needs of this group of learners, as well as their families, are fully reflected and integrated into the ongoing work of the ASL review and action plan.

Find out more [here](#).

University courses for all

Abertay University has been a leader in widening access for more than 25 years. Its commitment to providing transformational opportunities to everyone who has the ability to benefit, underpins its approach of supporting those who might not find them elsewhere, with a range of routes to an Abertay degree.

A spokesperson for the University said: "As part of our widening access activity we were delighted to work with RCET to deliver a Creative Forces event at Abertay in June 2019. This day saw more than 30 S3-S6 pupils with a Service background from local secondary schools take part. The messages of the day were 'The Future's Bright' and 'Anything is Possible'.

"We aimed to inspire and empower participants to consider higher education as a viable option by providing a meaningful and enjoyable experience within the university (as well as providing continuing professional development to teachers that accompanied participants). Pupils attending were identified by their schoolteachers as benefiting from the experience arranged.

"Although the current pandemic has prevented on-campus activity during 2020, we hope this will be the start of a long-term relationship with both RCET and our local Armed Forces camps at Leuchars and Condor."

Discover more with the [staff video](#) and [pupil video](#).



Reviewing our Forces Kids Resource Boxes

Pupils from across the country are continuing to review a range of books from our Forces Kids Resource Boxes, telling us what they think of the books, their favourite parts, what the key messages are, whether they would recommend them to others and, if so, which age group would they be most suitable for.

Some of our partners have been posting blogs to share their views on a range of academic subjects.

To date we have posted 10 pupil book reviews and six academic blogs, with more information available [here](#).

Creative Forces

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 also provides schools with information to understand and support Armed Forces children.

There is no single formula for a Creative Forces event and the character of the day will be influenced by factors such as the host

institution's subject expertise, the characteristics and needs of the local Service child population, and the requirements of participating schools. Events are tailored towards a primary or secondary school audience. However, a typical Creative Forces event may involve activities such as: academic taster sessions; a tour of the higher education 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, with the event's overall goal to increase aspirations to pursue higher education among students from Armed Forces families.

Abertay University was the first in Scotland to host a Creative Forces event. Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, it is not possible to hold in-person events on campus, but some establishments are producing digital alternatives. For more information, visit www.scipalliance.org

The importance of pupil-led professional CPD

Scott Sangster, RCET's Youth Participation officer for Highlands and Moray, outlines his work with youth forums and their innovative ideas



WITHIN RCET's Youth Participation Project (YPP), we have been working collaboratively with schools and young people to ensure 'that the voices of children and young people are heard and taken seriously on issues that affect them' (UNCRC Article 12).

Throughout this process we have consulted more than 300 young people on issues they highlighted, such as the challenges faced by parental deployments, transitions, mental health and education.

This cohort of young people led the way in

co-producing opportunities; taking the time to share their views and opinions, and did so with eloquence and an ability to articulate their feelings drawn from their experiences. Our approach offers support, allowing young people the space and time to talk and feel listened to, but also enables the co-production of all our work. Being clear from the onset that we were looking to support young people from Forces families and turn their ideas in action, has provided YPP with potential solutions to challenges these young people have identified.

In the last school term of 2020, YPP designed an innovative approach in collaboration with secondary schools in the Highland and Moray local authority areas, exploring the potential for Action Learning opportunities via Microsoft Teams. While planning these sessions alongside teachers, young people made suggestions they felt would enable them to raise awareness among teachers and other young people.

While discussing the idea of raising

Improving data collection

By Sarah Rogers, RCET Policy and Research Officer

RCET was pleased to bring together members of our Advisory Group for our third meeting to consider the issue of data on Armed Forces children and young people in Scotland. Informative presentations were heard from Laura Falconer, CEO at RCET; Rachel Wolford, Headteacher at Kinloss Primary School; and Carolyn MacLeod, ADES National Transitions Officer.

Engaging group discussions followed considering the benefits that improved data collection could bring for children and young people and the services working to support them, while also considering the challenges that might be

encountered in trying to improve data collection and potential solutions to help address some of these challenges. Overall, there was a high degree of support for improving data collection for Armed Forces children and young people in Scotland and RCET looks forward to working with Advisory Group members to take forward this important issue to help ensure the unique needs of Armed Forces children and young people are identified, recognised, understood, and met.

awareness, the young people also considered why and who could benefit, which led to teacher CPD. Although young people recognise there are currently several teacher CPD opportunities, they expressed the view that there could be value in young people delivering sessions directly to school staff. The young people recognise they would need to build their confidence in presentation skills and design an appropriate method of delivery. In response to the question: 'What would the benefits of this approach be?' Tiana, 16, a member of Military Youth Voice, said: "It would benefit more if young people delivered it because we are currently undergoing the experience, it would be easier to answer questions, you can see the raw emotion and there is no way that there could be miscommunication or misinterpretation between saying it to an adult and then them delivering the information."

This begs the question – "who are the experts here?"



A learning process

The Educational Challenges of Armed Forces Children, by Rowena Piers, PhD Candidate in Clinical Psychology, the University of Edinburgh



FINDINGS and recommendations in the *Educational Challenges of Armed Forces Children* report summarises outcomes from a research project funded by RCET and carried out by the University of Strathclyde. The research explored literature on the experiences and educational outcomes of Armed Forces children.

The report outlines the academic and emotional impact of the unique challenges of parental deployment, mobility and mental health on Armed Forces children. An integrated, collaborative approach is required to support the educational wellbeing of Armed Forces children, with key recommendations broadly falling into three main categories:

1. Training and awareness
2. Resources and programmes
3. Further research and data collection.

Here are a selection of key points and recommendations:

- Accurate information about the academic achievement of Armed

Forces children is necessary in order to ensure that their educational needs are being met

- Parental deployment and high levels of mobility are the two major challenges for Armed Forces children, which have been shown to negatively impact pupils academically, socially and emotionally
- It is important to understand the mental health needs of Armed Forces families, incorporating a trauma-informed approach within educational settings
- Armed Forces families should be actively involved in the development of any programmes and initiatives
- Training should focus on preparing teachers to support Armed Forces children through challenges, such as parental deployment and school transitions
- How best to support Armed Forces children is a greatly under-researched, so further contemporary, empirical research is required.

Read the full report [here](#).

Pupils' corner

Since March 2020 remote, digital, blended learning have become regular features in the Scottish educational context and schools have done an amazing job of adapting to these new ways of teaching.

Much has been written about how children and young people have coped with these new experiences, but here we feature some advice from our young people on what for them makes a positive learning experience.

- Continuity of the platforms on which the teaching sessions are delivered is helpful
- Variety is important because pupils respond to different approaches
- Being able to get your questions answered fairly quickly is important
- Hearing your name mentioned by your teacher is important - provided you are not in trouble!
- Teachers being aware of all your work demands is important to avoid getting swamped by too much at any one time
- Live sessions with teachers talking through the work are great but not always possible
- Break out rooms, if possible, are good to discuss topics and share ideas.



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