THE CENTRE FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP

ARMY

CAL CONFERENCE 2026

LEADERSHIP, RESILIENCE AND WARFIGHTING



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CAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

THE CENTRE FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP | ARMY

LEADERSHIP, RESILIENCE AND WARFIGHTING

WELCOME
09:40 – Lt Col David Falconer
09:50 – Maj Gen Nick Cowley OBE

10:00-11:00 – MORNING PANEL 1
Iryna Nikorak and Maj Olha Bihar
Chair: Dr Linda Risso

11:00-11:30 – BREAK

11:30-12:30 – MORNING PANEL 2
Lt Gen Mike Elviss CB MBE, Chris Chant,
Chair: Paul O'Neill CBE

12:30-13:30 – LUNCH

13:30-14:30 – PANEL DISCUSSION
Lord Toby Harris, Prof. Teija Sederholm,
Prof. Joakim Berndtsson, Sir John Armitt
Chair: Dr Stella Adorf-Bélanger

14:30-15:00 – BREAK

15:00-16:00 – Q&A SESSION
Lord Toby Harris, Prof. Teija Sederholm,
Prof. Joakim Berndtsson, Sir John Armitt
Chair: Dr Stella Adorf-Bélanger

16:00-16:15 – CONCLUSIONS
ASM WO1 John Miller

16:15-16:45 – CLOSING ADDRESS
Maj Gen Nick Cowley OBE

GENERAL INFORMATION

Conference security and fire safety

In case of fire or any emergency, please make your way out of the conference room and follow the marked fire route. Venue staff and members of the Centre for Army Leadership will facilitate your swift and safe exit from the building to the designated assembly area.

First aid and emergencies

Should there be a requirement for first aid, please alert a member of the event staff who will ensure that a qualified individual will be made available to assist you. For more serious emergencies, the emergency services will be called.

Livestreaming, post-event media content, social media

The *Leadership, Resilience, and Warfighting* conference will be live-streamed to registered viewers via the Centre for Army Leadership's YouTube Channel.

The event is on the record. However, on the day of the conference it will run under Chatham House Rule. This means that delegates in the room and viewers online can engage on social media and post comments. However, **they must not attribute quotes or ideas to individual speakers**.

After the event, provided we obtain authorisation, the recording will be uploaded onto the @CentreforArmyLeadership YouTube Channel and it will be accessible without restrictions.

Questions

We encourage active participation and thoughtful discussion on the topics presented throughout the conference. To facilitate this, we will be hosting panel sessions in both the morning and afternoon. Please use the QR code to submit your questions via Slido.

OPENING & CLOSING ADDRESSES

Major General Nick Cowley OBE
Director Leadership



Major General Cowley joined the British Army in 2000 and commissioned into The Queen's Royal Hussars with whom he conducted tours of Kosovo and Iraq. From 2005 he commanded at both troop and squadron level in a specialist unit. During that time, he conducted multiple tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. Major General Cowley served as the Chief of Staff of 16 Air Assault Brigade in 2014/15 before studying for a Masters Degree in Planning and Strategy at the US Joint Advanced Warfare School in Norfolk, Virginia. In 2016/17 Major General Cowley deployed to Iraq as part of the coalition to defeat ISIS before assuming command of The Queen's Royal Hussars in Germany. On completion of unit command in 2019, he worked as the Military Assistant to The Chief of the General Staff before assuming command of 16 Air Assault Brigade in 2021. As a Brigadier, he was appointed Commander of the Combat Manoeuvre Centre in July 2023. In October 2024, Major General Cowley was appointed as Commandant Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Director Army Leadership. He is also the 2* advocate for the Army Multicultural Network. In February 2025, Major General Cowley assumed command of Army Individual Training Command (AITC). Major General Cowley is married to Katherine and they have three daughters. In 2011 he founded The Talent Tap, a charity which helps underprivileged school leavers achieve their potential. More recently he founded a not-for-profit aimed at attracting more talent and technology into defence and security. He has been awarded a QCVS in 2009, an MBE in 2015 and an OBE in 2019.

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

In order of appearance on the stage

Dr Linda Risso
Centre for Army Leadership



Linda is Senior Researcher at the Centre for Army Leadership (CAL). She is the convenor of the CAL Annual Conference and the editor of the *CAL Leadership Insights* series. She is Director of the Richard Holmes Library (Robertson House, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst) and Deputy Director of the CAL Research Institute. Prior to joining the Ministry of Defence, Linda worked as Deputy Director of the Office of the Historical Advisor at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Mons. Between 2006 and 2016, Dr Risso was Associate Professor of History at the University of Reading and Director of the MA programme. Linda is an expert on European security and defence since 1945. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Historical Research in London and of the Royal Historical Society. Linda holds a PhD in History from the University of Cambridge.

Iryna Nykorak
Ukrainian Parliament



Iryna is a Member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, where she chairs the Subcommittee on Veterans' Rehabilitation and leads the cross-party parliamentary group "Veterans Now". Her work focuses on defence and veterans' policy, military resilience, and advancing the role of women in Ukraine's security and defence sector. In 2022, she founded Arm Women Now, which pioneered Ukraine's first officially approved women's military uniform. Iryna's advocacy on women, security and defence has been presented at NATO HQ and international defence and security forums across Europe. She is also the author of the NATO-supported book Strong Women of a Strong Country and founder of the annual international forum Protection and Respect: Women's Role in Achieving Peace. She is an alumna of the European Parliament's Young Political Leaders Programme and U.S. Congress Open World Program, and has been recognised among Ukraine's 100 most influential women in 2025.

Maj Olha Bihar
Ukrainian Army



Olha, call sign "Witch," is Deputy Head of the Central Directorate of Unmanned Systems, Land Forces Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Since joining the military during the defence of Kyiv in 2022, she has progressed from company-level service and platoon command to battalion, brigade, and corps-level leadership. She commanded infantry and mortar platoons in combat and later held artillery positions at battalion and brigade levels. From 2022 to 2026, she participated in combat operations across multiple areas. Major Bihar leads UAS capability development and employment, digital transformation, and the Middle Strike UAS Coordination Center. Her key achievement is creating a digital UAS mission reporting and analytics system connecting company-level operations with corps headquarters, enabling near real-time visibility and data-driven decision-making. She holds two Master's degrees, completed operational-level education at the National Defence University of Ukraine, and was the top student in Operation UNIFIER's Battalion Staff Officers' Training Course.

Paul O'Neill CBE
Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)



Paul is Senior Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). His research interests cover national security strategy, NATO, and organisational aspects of Defence and security, including organisational design, human resources, professional military education and decision-making. Previously, Paul was a Royal Air Force officer working in strategy and human resources roles across Defence. He co-hosts the Talking Strategy podcast series, which explores key thinking about national security and defence strategy and strategic leadership. His career included commanding the Defence School of Personnel Administration, leading the military team working on the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and latterly as the Head of Defence People Strategy. He has undertaken operational tours in Iraq, Northern Ireland, Oman, Turkey and Afghanistan where he was the Senior Advisor on Strategy and Policy to the Afghan Ministry of Interior.

Lt Gen Mike Elviss CB MBE
Commander Allied Rapid Reaction Corps



Mike Elviss commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Artillery in August 1995, joining 29th Commando Regiment Royal Artillery. He commanded 1st Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, 20th Armoured Brigade, the 3rd (UK) Division, the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps and UK Land Forces. On the staff, Elviss served in tactical, operational, and strategic military headquarters: as Chief of Staff 20th Armoured Brigade, the Military Assistant to COMARRC, and then the Military Assistant to the Deputy Commander of the International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan. He was Assistant Head Operations of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Current Commitments Teams in the Operations Directorate of the Ministry of Defence, before being Head Operations Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. He attended the Higher Command and Staff Course in 2015 and became a member of the Royal College of Defence Studies in 2018 prior to filling the post of Assistant Chief of Staff (Operations) in Headquarters Land Forces. Latterly, he was Chief of Staff (Operations) at the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters. Elviss was appointed Master Gunner Saint James's Park in November 2025, sits on the Regimental Council of the Honourable Artillery Company and is the President of the Amphibious Bombardment Association.

Chris Chant
Military Strategic Headquarters



Chris Chant is Deputy Director, Resilience and Home Defence, within the UK Military Strategic Headquarters. Since early 2024, he has overseen Project PUMA, which develops civilian enablers across government and industry to support military mobility. He is also the MOD's senior sponsor for Civil Military Interaction (CIMIC). In 2020, he became Director of the Joint Maritime Security Centre and UK National Coordinator for Maritime Security Response, strengthening coordination between the Royal Navy and civilian agencies. In 2022, he joined the Department for Transport, overseeing resilience and contingency planning. He has also worked internationally as a security sector reform consultant. An Army Reservist since 2020, Chris commissioned into the General Service Corps in 2024 and serves as a CIMIC adviser.

Dr Stella Adorf-Bélanger
NATO Parliamentary Assembly



Stella is Director of the Economics and Security Committee at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels, where she leads a team responsible for shaping policy discussions and recommendations regarding economic and energy security among parliamentarians from 32 NATO Nations. She has served NATO for over a decade, across all major strategic and political headquarters, including the Legal Office and at Strategic Plans & Policy at NATO HQ, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation; strategic historical advisor for the Command Group at NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE); Head, Situational Awareness, at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Situation Centre and Operations Division. Her last position before joining the NATO PA was Head, Russia Policy, at the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division (PASP) at NATO Headquarters, Brussels. Stella holds a PhD in the history of transatlantic relations, and before her career at NATO, she worked as an adviser in the academic sector as well as in industry.

Lord Toby Harris
National Preparedness Commission



Lord Toby Harris Chair of the National Preparedness Commission, which has been influential in developing the UK Government Resilience Action Plan and has become the leading body promoting better preparedness for a major crisis or incident. He has conducted two independent reviews on London's terrorism preparedness and a major review for the Ministry of Justice (*The Harris Review: Changing Prisons, Saving Lives*). Formerly, he was a Council Leader, London Assembly member, Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, member of the EU Committee of the Regions, and chaired National Trading Standards. He is a Visiting Professor at Imperial College and at Cranfield University, and chairs the Fundraising Regulator, which oversees charitable fundraising. Until September 2025 he chaired the General Dental Council that regulates dental professionals. He has been a Life Peer since 1998, chairs the Labour Peers, and is a former member of the Joint Committee on National Security.

Prof. Teija Sederholm

National Defence University, Finland



Teija is Adjunct Professor in the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy at the Finnish National Defence University, specialising in societal resilience, total defence and comprehensive security. She leads a five-year research project on *Total Defence as Part of National Resilience* and heads the University's contribution to the Strategic Research Council of Finland's six-year research programme *Safe Water for All*, examining emerging threats to water security and their implications for national security, total defence and societal resilience. Teija's research explores how societies can strengthen their resilience in an increasingly complex security environment, with expertise in cognitive warfare, inter-agency cooperation and the interplay between civilian and military dimensions of security. She serves on the Board of the Military Sociological Society of Finland and on the Board of the Lotta Svärd Foundation, where her work focuses particularly on supporting women's voluntary national defence training and education and their contribution to societal resilience.

Prof. Joakim Berndtsson

University of Gothenburg, Sweden



Joakim is Professor at the School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, and a researcher at the Swedish Centre for Studies of Armed Forces and Society (CSMS). He is also Co-Director of the Military Personnel theme for the Civil-Military Relations Network at Carleton University, where he was a Visiting Professor with the Canadian Defence and Security Network in 2025. His research examines Swedish and Nordic total defence planning and organisation, civil-military collaboration, military professionalism, military–society relations, and public opinion on defence and security policy. With Irina Goldenberg and Stéfanie von Hlatky, he co-edited *Total Defence Forces in the Twenty-First Century* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023) and is co-editing *Reserves at the Ready* (forthcoming with Springer). He is principal investigator of a Swedish Research Council project on civil-military collaboration in Scandinavian total defence organisations and contributes to a Swedish Armed Forces-funded project on military professionalism and public opinion.

Sir John Armitt CBE FREng FICE
Chair PPP Commission



Sir John Armitt is Senior Vice President of the Institution of Civil Engineers and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Institution of Civil Engineers and City & Guilds of London Institute. He served as Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority from 2007 to 2014, overseeing the organisation responsible for delivering the venues and infrastructure for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. His previous executive roles include Chief Executive of Network Rail, Railtrack plc and Costain, as well as Chief Executive of Union Railways, which was responsible for developing the high-speed Channel Tunnel Rail Link. In 2013, he published the independent Armitt Review into long-term infrastructure planning in the UK. Sir John was awarded a CBE in 1996 for his contribution to the rail industry and was knighted in 2012 for services to engineering and construction. He has received honorary doctorates from the universities of Portsmouth, Birmingham, Reading and Warwick.

WO1 John Miller
Army Sergeant Major



Warrant Officer (Class One) Miller joined the Royal Corps of Signals in 1999. He was Regimental Sergeant Major of 16 Air Assault Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (216) before commissioning in 2021. He has held senior soldier positions at every echelon of the Army. His experience spans both Field Army formations and instructional roles within Standing Joint Command. Operationally, he has deployed to multiple theatres, including the Balkans, Iraq, and multiple tours in Afghanistan. Since April 2021, he has been the Command Sergeant Major of 1st (United Kingdom) Division and subsequently the Field Army. During this time, he supported the introduction of 'How We Fight 26', the modernisation and lethality transformation plan, and the Army's response to the people challenges of recruitment, retention, and culture. On completion of the Intermediate Command and Staff Course (Land) in March 2025, Warrant Officer (Class One) Miller was appointed as the Army Sergeant Major.

THE CENTRE FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP | ARMY

Our Purpose

The British Army requires the highest standards of leadership. It is a core function of our institution and a fundamental component of fighting power. Our leadership philosophy is values-based and motivated not by self-interest but for the service of others.

The Centre for Army Leadership (CAL) exists to champion leadership excellence and to optimise the Army's human 'edge' that underpins operational success. We support the development of exceptional leaders not just for the British Army, but for the whole nation.

Our Role

The CAL is the guardian of the Army's Leadership Doctrine, the codification of our leadership experience and philosophy built over more than 350 years. We act as the Army's leadership conscience, calibrate its thinking against multiple sectors and, through our Research Institute, ensure conceptual rigour. Furthermore, our persistent communication and engagement activity seeks to stimulate debate, awareness, and critical thinking.

We are committed to the betterment of every leader, across the whole force, at all ranks, Regular or Reserve, through life.

We achieve this by:

- Developing leadership as an organisational capability;
- Championing the professionalisation of leadership;
- Acting as the custodians of Army Leadership Doctrine;
- Acting as the proponent of Army leadership excellence;
- Applying academic rigour to leadership learning and development;
- Communicating the Army Leadership Doctrine to all ranks of the British Army;
- Developing and engaging with a wide global network of leadership stakeholders.

THE CAL TEAM



Prof. Lloyd Clark

Director of Research

Educated in War Studies at King's College, University of London, and a widely acclaimed published author, Lloyd is a specialist in command and leadership with particular interest in fighting methods and doctrine development. He was instrumental in the creation of the CAL in 2016/17.

Lt Col David Falconer

Head of the Centre for Army Leadership

David has deployed operationally to Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Falkland Islands and Iraq. He attended Advanced Command Staff Course in 2022 and has recent NATO experience as Chief of Staff to the Joint Operational Command Advisory Team North. Prior to joining the CAL, he commanded the Northumbria Universities' Officer Training Corps 2023-25.





Dr Linda Risso

Senior Researcher

Linda is the Editor of the *CAL Leadership Insights* and Director of the Richard Holmes Library. Prior to joining the MoD, Linda worked in the Office of the Historical Advisor at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (NATO), in Mons, Belgium. She was Associate Professor in History at the University of Reading (2006-2016). She is an expert on European security and defence since 1945.

Maj Tom Bucknall

SO2 Leadership

Tom is the Chief of Staff at the Centre for Army Leadership. His career has seen him deployed overseas on Close Protection and Plans Officer roles in Africa and the Middle East, whilst domestically he supported the Commonwealth Games, the COVID pandemic and the Ukrainian basic training. His most recent appointments include instructor at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and Deputy Commandant at the Defence School of Policing and Security.





WO1 Donna Douglass

WO1 Leadership

Donna joined the Adjutant General's Corps (Staff and Personnel Support) in 1998. With over 27 years of operational, instructional and leadership experience, including deployments to Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan and South Sudan, and as the first female soldier in the Army to serve as an instructor within the Defence Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Extraction (SERE) Training Organisation. She is a passionate advocate for developing people, strengthening leadership, and helping others realise their potential.

WO2 Ben Page

WO2 Leadership

Ben joined the British Army in 2003, serving with 13 Air Assault Regiment RLC before transferring to 1 Royal Anglian. He has extensive operational experience, including multiple tours in Afghanistan and deployments to Nigeria, Kenya, Brunei, and Israel. A distinguished Platoon Sergeant, instructor, and Company Sergeant Major, he has led on modernising trench warfare tactics.





Lt Col Caroline Constantine

LDA LEDG

Having joined the Army in 1996 as a musician, Caroline was appointed as a WO1 Bandmaster in 2004, later commissioning into the AGC(ETS) in 2010. After initial tours as an LDO, she has since served in LDA roles including ITG, JITG, Defence Academy, Education Branch and held Sub-Unit Command. Caroline currently provides LDA SQEP with the support of the G7 team across all units in the LEDG, with a focus on the CAL and its role as the Leadership Army Professional Standards Authority (APSA).

Ms Susan Collis

Admin Officer

Susan is the CAL Administrative Officer, providing essential administrative and organisational support to the team. Drawing on her experience in customer service, IT support, and business management from running her own company for over 20 years, she enables the effective delivery of CAL's work and priorities.



CAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE



The Centre for Army Leadership's Research Institute was created in 2017 as a multi-disciplinary body to bring together the CAL and its Fellows with wider Defence, Allied armies, cross-sector organisations, and academia, to better understand the art and science of leadership. The Research Institute contributes to the Army's leadership debate through the production of evidence-based studies. The Research Institute provides intellectual rigour in support of the CAL's mission to champion Army leadership excellence to optimise the Army's fighting edge, to underpin its operational success, and to benefit the wider society.

The Richard Holmes Library

The CAL Leadership Library (The Richard Holmes Library) opened in May 2022. It is located on the ground floor of Robertson House at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. The Richard Holmes Library offers access to an outstanding set of bibliographical resources, official documents, research reports, audio recordings, and visual material to support and enhance the study of leadership within the British Army and beyond.

CAL Fellows

The CAL Fellows are military and civilian experts and practitioners in their respective fields who are passionate about leadership and about supporting the CAL in its research and engagement objectives.

Honorary Fellows:

Mark Laity
Dr Jamie Shea CMG

Senior Fellows:

Dr David Atkinson
Prof. Susanne Braun
WO1 (retd) Paul Carney MBE
Dr Munish Chauhan
Prof. Alexander Evans OBE
Col Matthew Ketterer
Maj Simon Lash
Prof. Gerri Matthews-Smith
Nikki McLeary
Lt Gen (retd) Massimo Panizzi
Dr Tess Morris-Paterson
Dr Lucie Pebay
Lt Col (retd) Langley Sharp MBE
Dr Alexandra Thorp
Donna Verdi
Dr Dennis Vincent MBE
Dr Declan Woods

You can read more about our Fellows here.

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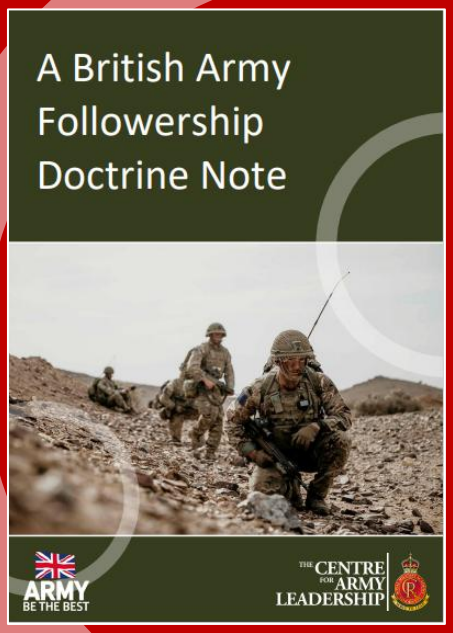
CAL LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

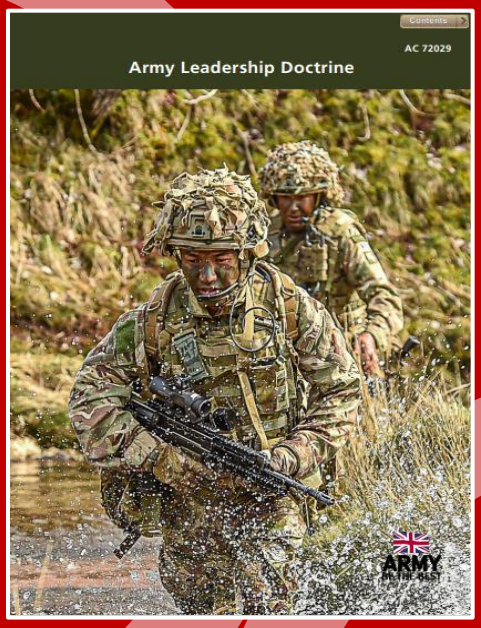
The CAL publishes the *Leadership Insights*. They are short, agile pieces that act as a leader development resource, both for individuals and groups. These short 'think-piece' papers are ideal for facilitated group discussion, exploring a wide range of leadership topics in greater detail and challenging perceptions using the curated questions provided in each paper. Series Editor: Dr Linda Risso.

The *Leadership Insights* are available for download on our website.

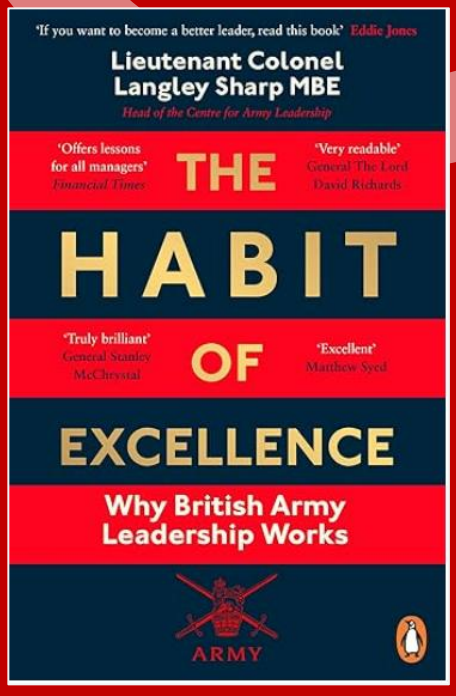


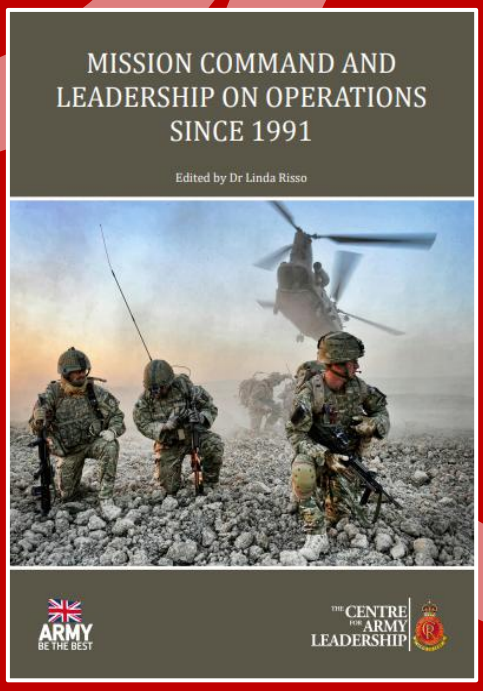
CAL PUBLICATIONS

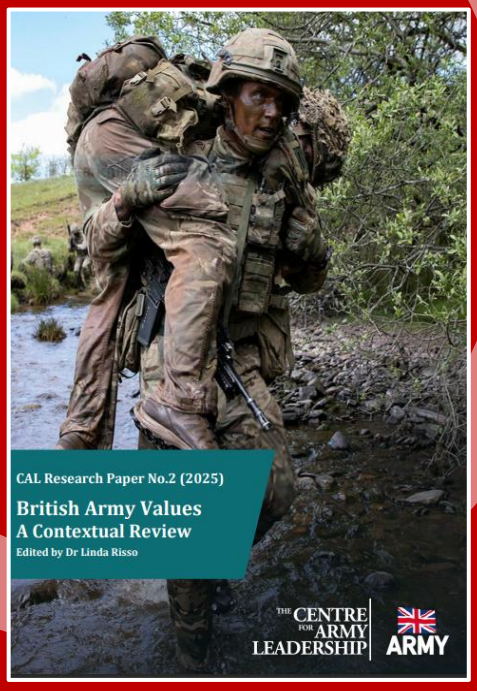












CAL PODCASTS









THE CAL PODCAST

With over 1,000 years of combined leadership experience, from Defence's most senior officers to champions of sport and industry, the Centre for Army Leadership Podcast is unsurprisingly one of the most successful military leadership podcasts globally. Our guests reflect upon a lifetime of leading others, how they've grown and, more importantly, what they've learned.

Created in collaboration with Dan Russell (The Army Bloke), the Centre for Army Leadership's new podcast Designed to Lead seeks to showcase how the British Army develops leaders at key stages of a soldier's and officer's careers. Each episode will focus on a different part of their leadership journey, bringing in practitioners responsible for designing, delivering, and shaping leadership development through formal training and education.

DESIGNED TO LEAD





JOIN THE CAL ACTIVIST NETWORK

Are you passionate about leadership and developing future leaders? #

Do you want your opinions and ideas to genuinely result in Army-level change?

You'll be joining a highly motivated community of peers, from Private soldier to Brigadier, where everyone's opinions and ideas matter to the development of Army leadership and the CAL's outputs. The CAL will also support your own leader development journey with access to opportunities that will enhance your leadership knowledge, skills, and experience, whether through training, workshops, exclusive Activist events, and networking opportunities.

As a CAL Activist you will:

- Help shape the direction of the Army's Leadership Strategy.
- Be asked to provide feedback on Army-level leadership outputs and publications during their development.
- Get early notification and priority access to CAL events.
- Get access to monthly CAL Activist leadership workshops.
- Receive CAL support to enable and promote your grass-roots leader development ideas and initiatives.

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Please follow this link to sign up to the network.

THE LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

LEDG is the Army's lead for through-career leadership, education and development, contributing to Campaign Objectives including leadership culture, workforce development and professionalisation.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Centre for Army Leadership would like to thank all those who helped make this year's conference possible.

To the **speakers**, **moderators**, and **panellists**. We are grateful for your contributions to the Centre for Army Leadership's research.

To our **Sponsors** for their support.

To our **CAL Fellows**, for their efforts in supporting our research and engagement activities.

To our **CAL Activists** and **NCO Academy Champions**, for their contribution to the CAL outputs and to its thinking.

To all the **delegates**, particularly those who travelled from abroad.

To all **units**, for hosting us virtually.



Exercise RANGER HOPTON. July 2026. Photographer: Cpl Vincent Price.
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ARMY

Centre for Army Leadership
Robertson House
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UK

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