

PE1603/Q

Ministry of Defence Letter of 1 November 2016

Thank you for your letter dated 7 October regarding the Scottish Parliament's Public Petitions Committee consideration of a petition calling for greater scrutiny, guidance and consultation on Armed Forces visits to schools.

Please let me start by assuring you that our Armed Forces never visit schools for recruitment purposes and would only ever visit a school after being invited by a teacher to support school activities. No pupil or school student is ever signed-up or otherwise makes a commitment to become a recruit into the Armed Forces during the course of any school visit by our representatives. These visits can comprise presentations, citizenship talks, meetings with staff, participation in career events, practice interviews and activities with the students, such as science and maths challenges, and other indoor or outdoor exercises.

The Armed Forces do not intend to phase out the recruitment of personnel who are under the age of 18. We believe that our policies on under-18s in Service are robust and comply with national and international law. In addition to the comprehensive welfare system that is in place for all Service personnel we remain fully committed to meeting our obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and have taken steps to bestow special safeguards on young people under the age of 18.

Our recruiting policy is absolutely clear. No one under the age of 18 can join the Armed Forces without formal parental consent, which is checked twice during the application process. In addition, parents and guardians are positively encouraged to engage with the recruiting staff during the process. Furthermore all Service personnel have a statutory right to claim discharge up to their 18th birthday, and the right of discharge is made clear to all Service personnel on joining the Armed Forces.

All recruits under the age of 18 receive key skills education in literacy and numeracy, should they need it, and all are enrolled on to apprenticeships. The Armed Forces remain the UK's largest apprenticeship provider, equipping young people with valuable and transferable skills for life. I take pride in the fact our Armed Forces provide challenging and constructive education, training, and employment opportunities for young people, equipping them with valuable skills.

OFSTED regularly inspects our care of those newly joined young recruits and we are very proud of the standards we achieve. We welcome this specialist confirmation that we treat our young recruits well.

Unfortunately we are unable to provide all the information you have requested, however we do publish a number of statistical reports including recruitment intake and age. To assist your enquiry I have placed below links to the relevant reports.

<http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-index>

<http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-monthly-service-personnel-statistics-index>

Regards

Rt. Hon Mike Penning MP