

PE1603/GG

Petitioners' submission of 15 May 2017

Response to Public Petitions Committee session 20 April 2017 Quakers in Scotland and ForcesWatch, May 2017

We welcome the evidence provided by Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills John Swinney on 20 April 2017, and thank the Committee for their thorough questions.

In this submission we:

- Explore the disparity between Scottish Government policy on the need for balance and impartiality in careers advice, and what is actually happening in armed forces visits to schools in Scotland. This suggests that the current guidance and protocols are not sufficient, and additional measures or clarification are necessary.
- Respond to some specific points and queries raised during the discussion.
- Suggests points to take forward from the discussion.

The gap between policy and practice

During the session, the Deputy First Minister said: 'the central requirement of a career service [is] to provide a dispassionate assessment on any career opportunity and how that would relate to the individual skills, interests, attributes and outlook of any young person interacting with the career service'. His view is that there are sufficient strategies already in place to support the provision of such impartial career advice that outlines the risks as well as the opportunities, and provides a full and accurate picture. He also agreed that he would expect that careers advice would 'highlight the issues that have been raised by Medact and Combat Stress around the long-term consequences of being in the armed forces.' However no evidence was given as to what these strategies are, how they work in practice, how they are measured as successful, or how careers advisors would have their attention drawn to reports like those from Medact, Combat Stress or the Veterans Commissioner.

We have provided ample evidence that any existing provision to ensure balance and dispassionate career advice is frequently not adhered to. The reality of armed forces visits to schools is very different to what the Scottish Government would clearly consider to be right and appropriate. This is also suggested in evidence provided to the Committee. For example, the Scottish Youth Parliament conducted a survey of young people on this topic and noted the following responses that demonstrate the reality of armed forces visits to schools falling short of fulfilling a requirement for balance:

- 'As a 14 year old who was in the closet at the time, hearing "We'll make you into a proper man" was damaging. They presented the armed forces in terms of the stereotype of a "macho man."'

- 'No more Top Gun music (which I witnessed first-hand). It fictionalises what is really at points a matter of life and death, and glorifies killing.'
- 'The presentation talked about the positives of being in the army, but **didn't address negative consequences**. The presented completely sidestepped a question someone had about PTSD.' (emphasis ours).
- '**Of the focus group participants who had experienced armed forces visits to schools, only one had experienced a presentation that highlighted possible negative consequences of a career in the army as well as the positive.**' (emphasis ours).
- 'Young people consulted were asked for their views on the petitions' three main recommendations on guidance, monitoring and consultation. Of the young people consulted, 34 out of 45 young people agreed with the petition's call, 7 disagreed, and 4 were unsure. "I feel this is a very good plan because people who join the armed forces need to know everything that is involved in their role." "There should be different standards for the armed forces as recruiters [compared to other employers]."'

Other evidence of this gap between policy and practice include the following:

- Skills Development Scotland (formerly Career Scotland) has organised armed forces visits to schools in the past, and has Careers Advisers in all Scottish Schools. The Careers Advisers refer all students they speak with to their jobs website, My World of Work; the armed forces sections of this website mention some of the risks and legal restrictions, but with serious omissions. Some sections refer to 'mental, physical and emotional challenges' but others, such as the Army Soldier page does not. There is no detail or indication of the severity of the risk. No reference is made on any of the pages to risk to life, taking life, or being under military law.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that a biased approach to information is normal. In 2012 some Army recruiters in Scotland claimed they were, 'ordered to lie to get youngsters to sign up...to hide the horrors of war from the potential recruits.'

We would be happy to meet with the Deputy First Minister, or appropriate civil servant, to discuss the above and other evidence demonstrating that military interactions with schools are frequently not adhering to Government stipulations regarding balance and impartiality.

Clarification of points raised by the Committee

RECRUITMENT AND THE NEED FOR BALANCE

During the session, a Committee member stated that, 'Soldiers today are actually very professionally trained, and the costs of training them... are considerably more than when I joined the Army... there is a huge investment in the military in making sure they get the right person and the right person completes the training.... there is no point

taking someone on getting him through basic training and then advanced training for him to leave; they would look for a long career for that person.'

We concur that it would be preferable for the Army to 'get the right person' who 'completes the training' rather than leaving during or after expensive training. However, the reality again falls short of this ideal: one-third of those who enlist in the army before they are 18, amounting to several hundred individuals per year, leave or are discharged before they complete training. Research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2012 found that recruits who joined the army without mainstream qualifications, with underdeveloped literacy skills, or because they did not know what else to do, were much more likely than other recruits to be early leavers. Early Service Leavers feature among the veterans who are most affected by deprivation, a lack of transferable qualifications and skills being a common complaint.

Giving pupils balanced, full information about armed forces careers along with other options, may reduce the number of young people who begin training only to become Early Service Leavers or even leave before completing training, and find themselves without employment or training. However, the evidence provided to the Committee shows a lack of balance around armed forces visits to schools, both in relation to visits made by other employers and in terms of the messages given over during visits. As such, it is more likely that young people join without adequate information about the reality of a career in the armed forces and less likely that their career in the military will be long and successful.

The data suggests that no other public service or business employer visits schools to the same extent as the armed forces and a recent study suggests information about apprenticeships is not distributed well in schools in Scotland. The Scottish Youth Parliament said in their submission to the Committee that, 'At the focus group, it was also highlighted that schools with strong links to the armed forces could be unbalanced when it came to other potential employer visits. Two focus group participants related their experience of going to a school with strong links to a military base: "The school can't function without [the military base]. They have loads of access to the school as a result. On Careers Day, 90% of the stalls were armed forces. It's positive if you're interested in the armed forces, but I have absolutely zero interest and there's nothing for anyone else.'" Furthermore, the increase in curriculum activities delivered by the armed forces, particularly through the delivery of STEM education, has increased their access to schools. The submission from Scientists for Global Responsibility to the Committee, indicates that there is disquiet among the scientific community regarding the military's involvement in STEM teaching.

It is important that all students get rounded and balanced information about the armed forces and military activities, whether or not they are considering enlisting. Ensuring balanced and impartial information is necessary in order for the school environment to be one that facilitates critical thought. Greater balance could be ensured if schools were encouraged to engage pupils in critical debate about sustainable security, so that

a narrative that military strength equates to long-term security, which is political opinion rather than equivocal fact, is explored within the education process.

EVIDENCE OF ARMED FORCES VISITS TO SPECIAL SCHOOLS

The Deputy First Minister asked for evidence showing that there have been armed forces visits to special education schools in Scotland. We have data for 13 visits by the armed forces to special schools in Scotland. Five of these occurred between 2010-12 (three by the Army and two by the Navy) and eight occurred between 2015-16 (all by the Army). Given the gaps in the data (e.g. we have no data for the RAF or Navy since after 2013), it is not possible to give a definitive figure for the number of visits to special schools. More detail can be found in the Appendix.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF AN ARMED FORCES CAREER

A comparison was made during the evidence given by the Deputy First Minister between armed forces visits to schools, and visits from a “chemical company or social enterprise”. We would like to reiterate to the Committee that an armed forces career is different from any other, presenting unique moral implications, physical and mental health risks, contractual and legal obligations, and other risks and difficulties. Having spoken to people who work in the social enterprise sector they do not recognize or validate this comparison.

Going forward

In addition to our suggestions made in previous submissions, we highlight the following suggestions relevant to the discussion with the Deputy First Minister.

1. The Deputy First Minister said that he would be happy to consider applying a **Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment** (CRWIA) to armed forces visits to schools, as recommended by the coalition of child rights organisations Together Scotland. We urge the Committee to recommend that this step is taken forward by the Scottish Government as a positive move towards ensuring that childrens’ rights are being safeguarded, following the concerns raised in our petition and affirmed by Together and Scotland’s Children’s Commissioner.

2. We welcome the Deputy First Minister’s agreement to request **good quality data**, available to the public or to the Parliament on armed forces visits to schools, following specification from the Committee. Our hope would be that this data includes:

- The number of visits to schools conducted by military personnel to each primary, secondary and special school or college in Scotland yearly, categorized under the nature of each visit (e.g. career presentation, STEM activity, activity day, etc), and the year groups visited.
- The number of visits to schools, as above, conducted on behalf of the military, e.g. by employees of Capita.

- MoD funding spent on activities in primary, secondary and special schools or colleges in Scotland, differentiated by local authority area.

3. We ask the Committee to consider the gap between policy and practice outlined above, and to request **evidence on how the Developing Young Workforce strategy and guidance is operating**. Moreover, we ask the Committee to consider the need for more specific stipulation on ensuring balance regarding armed forces visits to schools in Scotland.

4. We urge the Committee to recommend that **no visits are made by the armed forces to special schools**, given the particular vulnerabilities of the pupils at those schools.

Appendix

Armed forces visits to special schools in Scotland ForcesWatch, May 2017

The following list shows armed forces visits to special schools in Scotland for which we have a record during the period 2010-16. The information has been obtained via FOI requests. Some datasets obtained through FOI do not show complete information (e.g. the name of the school is not included) or it is not clear if all schools are included, so it is not possible to say whether or not visits to special schools were made. There are also substantial gaps in the datasets available for the period 2010-16. No detailed RAF or Navy data is available after 2013.

Army

Visit date	school	activity	source
06/06/2011	Gorgie Mills School	Team building	1
07/09/2011	Burnhouse School	Careers presentation	1
16/08/2012	Balnacraig School	Personal Development Activity	2
01/09/2015	Balnacraig School	Careers Event	3
02/09/2015	Connect 5 Pupil Referral Unit	Liaison Visit	3
12/11/2015	Buchanan High School	Careers Fair	3
15/09/2015	Seamab School	Careers Event	3
19/11/2015	Kear Campus	Careers Presentation	3
27/01/2016	Closeburn House School	Careers Presentation	3
27/01/2016	Newlands Junior College	Personal Development Activity	3
07/03/2016	Gorgie Mills School	Work Experience	3

Navy

Visit date	school	activity	source
May 2012	Gorgie Mills School	Careers presentation	1
June 2012	Gorgie Mills School	Team building & Leadership	1

Information sources

1. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/scottish_school_visits
2. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/army_visits_to_schools_in_scotla
3. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/army_school_recruitment